



# MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

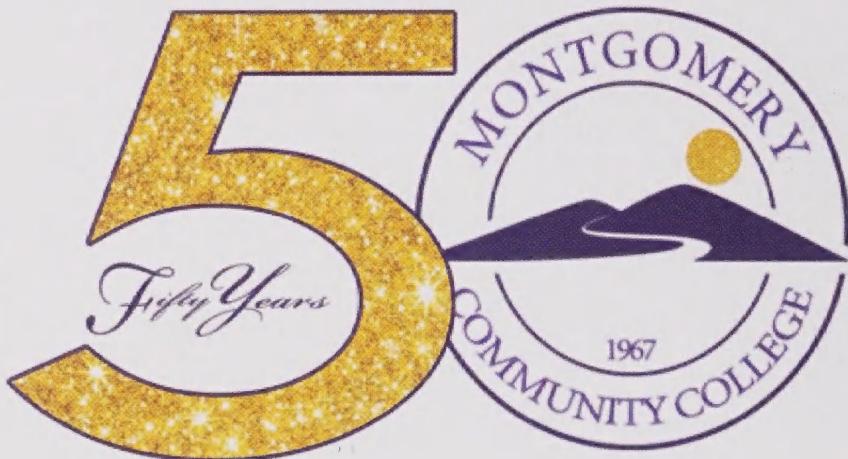


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# Introduction

A technical institute in Montgomery County started as an idea in the early 1960s. The idea led to discussions by a group of industrialists and educators who valued education and recognized the need in the county for access to job training and to high school diplomas for the many adults who never finished high school.

The idea became a vision. The vision grew into a mission and the mission into a plan to bring skills training and basic education to their isolated, rural county of immensely talented people who just needed an opportunity to grow intellectually.

The textile industry was going strong, but this group of visionaries saw that the lack of educational opportunities was holding back their employees and economic growth in the county.

Led by a brilliant, energetic, young Jesse Capel, the group went to work. There was a movement in North Carolina at that time to create community colleges, so the time was right to act.

In 1957, the NC General Assembly adopted the first Community College Act and provided funding for community colleges. By 1966, there were 43 Industrial Education Centers, Technical Institutes and Community Colleges, which were brought into one administrative organization under the State Board of Education and local boards of trustees.

Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) was one of eight schools established in 1967, but was not chartered as a state technical institute until 1971.

In 1967, the visionaries who had done the groundwork to establish MTI were appointed as the first board of trustees. Fred L. Taylor, J.C. McRae, Robert L. Liles Jr., John T. Kern, Eddie B. Coleman, Harold A. Scott Sr., Hubert W. Moss and Jesse S. Capel.

Capel was elected chairman. He was 34 years old, the youngest trustee chairman in the state. He continued as chairman for 16 years and the college is still dear to his heart. He is the only living member of the original board.

J.F. Allen was appointed to the board in 1969. When MTI was finally chartered by the state in 1971, four additional board members were appointed by the governor. They were Edgar A. Anderson, Eleanor Chappell, Ann Kirk and Charles Bruton.

Montgomery was one of the most rural, least populated and isolated counties in the state, so it took a bit of political maneuvering to get established and even more to get chartered.

No one disputes that, in a shrewd bargaining maneuver, a local politician blocked a piece of legislation that was important to the governor, but several have been credited. Nevertheless, it was a brilliant move because it opened the door for Montgomery County to enter the higher education movement to benefit the citizens, economic development of the county, and the existing industries.

All those involved at the time say the state leaders saw no harm in establishing a technical institute in Montgomery County. The paperwork wasn't completed for years because no one thought it would succeed.

The state money for community colleges was going to the big counties with money of their own to build a campus and large populations just waiting to fill the classes.

Montgomery had a population of just over 18,000 and a per capita income of less than \$20,000 a year. The only major highways were narrow two-lane roads: U.S. 220 going north and south and N.C. 24/27 going east and west. The area was ripe for what was the founding mission of the state community college system to "Take people where they are and carry them as far as they can go."

Mr. Capel and his visionary board knew that the local high school graduates who went off the college moved on big cities. Those who went to community colleges in neighboring counties were few and could afford the tuition and daily travel.

They had lived and worked in Montgomery County all their lives and recognized the immense talent and intellectual abilities there. So did the county commissioners and the board of education and numerous other local leaders.

The county didn't have money for a building, so the leaders cobbled together a campus by moving the board of education offices to a vacant school building for administrative offices and classrooms and a vacant auto dealership garage for technical training. Continuing education classes were held where at least a dozen people wanted to learn a skill - in homes, town halls, community buildings, on porches, under trees and in at least one tobacco barn.

State officials and educators had underestimated the ingenuity and plain old smarts of Montgomery County citizens. MTI hit the ground running and never looked back.

Fifty years is a half a century in time, but not that long ago in the memories of those who were there and those who came to work at MTI in the early years.

When the 2017 Board of Trustees planned the 50th Anniversary celebration, they identified 50 Trailblazers to share their memories of those early years.

Mr. Capel said they were not surprised that MTI was immediately accepted by the citizens. They were surprised - blessed, he said - at the caliber of employees who accepted the challenge of building a college, who took salary cuts to leave careers in the cities to move to Montgomery County and the dedication they brought with them. The first two presidents, Dr. David Bland and Marvin Miles were exactly the right people at the right time to lead MTI through the formative first 16 years when they built and moved into a building on its own campus, earned SACS accreditation and begin adding the unique programs that would identify Montgomery Community College nationwide.

Mr. Capel and the first administrators look back, shake their heads and smile.

"How did we do that," they ask. There was no handbook, no directives and no real organization. They all pitched in and did whatever they could at the time. Administration and faculty became a cohesive unit.

Within these pages you'll hear more than once that none of them were quite sure what a technical institute was, but they knew they wanted to train people for jobs and give them opportunities to learn about whatever interested them. The past fifty years speak for themselves. They succeeded.

This publication is a compilation of articles and photographs published by Montgomery Herald during Montgomery Community College's 50th anniversary year, 2017.

All articles in this publication were written by Mary Anderson and Michele Haywood

Thank you to each of these community partners for your sponsorship of this anniversary publication

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# History of Montgomery Community College

On September 7, 1967, the State Board of Education issued a charter of establishment to Montgomery Technical Institute, thanks to a group of forward-thinking Montgomery County citizens who valued education and recognized the need for job training after high school. Fifty years later, the board of trustees at Montgomery Community College set out to name 50 Trailblazers in recognition of 50 years of progress.

“Early on, it was apparent that so many more than 50 were important to MCC,” said MCC Board Chair, Claudia Bulthuis.

While the list could have been much longer, the Number One position belonged to “The citizens of Montgomery County, officials of our towns and county, and business and industry partners. [They] have contributed to the formation, growth and sustaining of the college.”

It was the citizens of Montgomery County who were the first students. They took a chance on a fledgling institution and earned high school diplomas. They earned degrees in industrial maintenance, business administration and secretarial science. They earned diplomas in practical nursing. They earned certificates in almost anything they had an interest in learning.

“At the time MTI was chartered, about 25 county citizens were enrolled in community colleges in neighboring counties,” said Jesse Capel, MTI’s first board chair. “Within a few years, we had over 1,000 county citizens involved in something at MTI. We were all proud of the community response. It showed us that people did want to learn when they had the opportunity,” Capel said.

In September 1970, MTI had 83 curriculum students enrolled in six programs. In September 2006, MCC had 865 curriculum students in 21 programs. An additional 1,484 students were enrolled in continuing education classes.

It was the citizens of Montgomery County who gave their vote of approval to a bond proposal for the building of a new facility.

In August 1973, the State Board of Education approved 76 acres donated by Colonel Joseph Reese Blair for a new Montgomery Technical Institute site. The county commissioners and MTI officials launched a \$975,000 bond referendum for October 5, 1974. It was during an economic downturn and no other bonds were approved that election year with the exception of one. Montgomery County citizens voted approval by 61 votes.

“The men and women in Montgomery County came to believe in Montgomery Technical Institute,” said Bruce Turner, the college’s first Learning Center Coordinator and one of its longest-term employees.

Over the years, the college was able to give back to the county in the form of successful graduates who had the skills to become outstanding citizens, business persons, law enforcement officers, nurses, EMTs, forest rangers, technicians and more.

In September, 2017, the college celebrated its 50th birthday with a full day of events, culminating in the recognition of the 50 Trailblazers who helped shape the future of MTI.

The day began with convocation, an official gathering of students, faculty and staff in the college’s multipurpose room. Two special presentations were made to outstanding faculty and staff members. English instructor Sandra “Sam” Britt was awarded the 2017 Excellence in Teaching Award, and director of distance education, Cindy Ellison, was awarded 2017 Staff Member of the Year. Next, the audience heard motivational speaker Odell Bizzell talk about making an impact. Following the convocation, students were treated to a “birthday party on the grounds” complete with birthday cake and a picnic lunch of hot dogs and hamburgers.

Later that afternoon, college officials dedicated a 55” bronze bell donated by long-time college benefactors Arron and Gelynda Capel. The Capels placed the bell to be rung at graduations and other special occasions as a symbol of the tradition of higher education. The bell is inscribed



*“May this bell ring in a new year for generations of Montgomery County students seeking to better their lives through education.”*

with the college's logo and sits in a frame attached to a concrete and brick platform near the center of campus. Weighing 3,400 pounds, the bell is rung manually with a rope. MCC's Student Government Association President, Matthew Monroe, had the honor of ringing it for the first time.

In his remarks at the dedication, Arron Capel said, “May this bell ring in a new year for generations of Montgomery County students seeking to better their lives through education.”

During the ceremony, retired pottery instructor Mike Ferree presented a butterfly vase to Gelynda Capel in honor of her long and dedicated service to the college. Ferree sculpted the large vessel which he said reminded him of Mrs. Capel's colorful yard.

“Gelynda has accomplished so many wonderful things for MCC while serving on the board of trustees. This clay form is a modest way of saying ‘thank you’ for your dedication to the college, for being the Face of MCC in the community, and in appreciation for your support of the pottery program,” Mike said.

The day's celebrations continued with the MCC Foundation Awards Ceremony where scholarships were awarded to students for the 2017-18 academic year. The ceremony began with a presentation of awards of a different sort. Chairman of the board, Claudia Bulthuis, recognized over 50 individuals and groups that in some capacity positively impacted Montgomery Community College over the past 50 years. These individuals were named Trailblazers after the MCC Trailblazer mascot for their groundbreaking efforts to make MCC a place of opportunity for all Montgomery County citizens. Their impact included everything from lobbying, to voting, to working, to attending, to graduating, to donating. Bulthuis read the names of the individuals and their contributions to the growth of the college. Trailblazers were presented with student-made commemorative pottery plaques with the MCC 50th anniversary logo stamped in them.

A new scholarship endowment established in 2017 was the MCC 50th Anniversary Endowed Scholarship. It will be awarded to a “future Trailblazers” in years to come.

MCC President, Dr. Chad Bledsoe, concluded the evening with a special announcement. The MCC Board of Trustees recommended and approved the naming of two buildings on the college's campus to mark MCC's 50th year. Building 100 was the first permanent home for Montgomery Technical Institute made possible by a donation of land from Colonel Joseph Reese Blair. Building 100 will be named Blair Hall to honor the Blair family. Building 200 will be named Capel Hall to honor the Capel family. Both families have given of their resources and service over the 50-year history of the college and continue to serve to this day. Dr. Bledsoe also announced that future celebrations will take place when campus renovations are completed and the buildings officially dedicated.

*GIFT -In September 2017 college officials dedicated a 55”bronze bell donated by long-time college benefactors Arron and Gelynda Capel. The Capels placed the bell to be rung at graduations and other special occasions as a symbol of the tradition of higher education. The bell is inscribed with the college's logo and sits in a frame attached to a concrete and brick platform near the center of campus. From left, Dr. Chad Bledsoe, Ron Capel, Richard Capel, Gelynda Capel, Dr. Mary Kirk, Arron Capel, Julianne Capel, Claudia Bulthuis and Jesse Capel.*



# Facts you should know about Col. Joseph Reese Blair:

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*\*He loved Montgomery County. \*He was a visionary. He had the confidence and patience to put a plan in motion that would come together as change came. Some plans would see fruition after his lifetime. \*He believed that education was the answer – to all the questions.*

*\*He was the benefactor who gave Montgomery County land to build a college. \*He gave Montgomery County land to build a central high school. \*He chose the highest hill and gave Montgomery County the land to build a hospital. \*He was devoted to his family. His five children share his curiosity, his love of learning, his sense of responsibility to respond to community needs, and his generosity.*

Recently, Claudia Blair Bulthuis, JoAnn Blair-Adams and Karen Blair, the three oldest children of Col Reese and Dr. Claudia Barton Blair, sat down for a conversation about their dad and the contributions of the Blair family. Two younger Blair siblings, Joseph Reese III, lives in Raleigh, and Mary lives in Arlington Va.

Claudia, JoAnn and Karen have all retired to the place their dad so dearly loved. “He would say Montgomery County was the greatest place in the world to live – always talked about the rivers and the mountains.” said Claudia.

In 1974, Col. Blair retired from the US Army where he had been director of research, then worked for the Federal Energy Administration. In 1982, he moved back to his beloved county, into his childhood home in Troy. “He thought Montgomery County was just heaven on earth,” said JoAnn. “His heart was always here. It was his desire to serve the county, especially in education, as much as he could.”

His choice of land to donate also chose the location of Montgomery Community College and the consolidated high school now under construction. According to the U.S. Forest Service, Col. Blair traded two plots of timber land in the Badin Lake area that were surrounded by Uwharrie National Forest land, for the acreage on Page Road near Troy.

MCC history records that in August, 1973, the State Board of Education approved the donation of 76 acres for Montgomery Technical College. MTI was about 10 years old and scattered about in various places. “He gave it a home,” Claudia said.

“He knew the land would be a catalyst to firmly establish the college,” added JoAnn. Later donations from Col. Blair brought the total acreage to approximately 150 acres that make up the college campus today. With remarkable foresight, Col. Blair made a donation of 54 acres of land adjoining MCC land, to the Montgomery County Board of Education. A neat, handwritten notation on the 1979 deed states that the land was for a central high school. The central high school is now under construction. The sisters laugh at their father’s “horse-trading,” which they call “house-trading.” He usually had a trade going on. The Uwharrie National Forest wanted to consolidate land in the forest and he would trade Blair family land for tracts he wanted outside the forest proper. JoAnn recalls when he donated the land for Montgomery Community College. “I remember his talking about it when we were spending our two weeks with Granny Ada in Troy,” she said. “I was quite young, but it sounded like a good idea to me. We never thought of our dad as a philanthropist. He just did what needed to be done.” Karen added that “he didn’t make decisions lightly, but when he made up his mind, it was going to happen.” Jesse Capel, the first chairman of the MCC Board of Trustees, and J.F. Allen are the only two surviving members of the original board. Jesse said Col. Blair’s legacy is the difference MCC has made to the county in education and the economy.

“MCC is the best thing that ever happened to Montgomery County. We worked hard for it and we are very proud of it.” Jesse said. “Col. Blair’s gifts of land were catalysts in our having a hospital and the community college. “Land for the college was a grand gesture and such a wonderful thing to do. It made the difference to get the bond issue for the college passed. That was the only education bond issue passed in the state that year.” Jesse said his first memory of Col. Blair was seeing him in uniform taking walks around town on his visits to Troy. “He was an imposing figure, but very friendly and would always stop and talk with you. He was an humble, generous, civic-minded man. He loved Montgomery County.” Col. Blair, with characteristic foresight, could see economic changes coming. JoAnn said he saw the college as an opportunity to promote the natural resources that were sustainable. He saw that textiles were not sustainable.” That was not the prevailing feeling in the 1970-80s when Montgomery County’s textile industry was thriving. Growing up, the Blair children spent two weeks every summer with their grandmother, Ada Allen Blair, in the big brick house with columns in the middle of Troy. Col. Blair was born in that house in 1914. His father, prominent attorney Joseph Reese I, died six months before he was born. Col. Blair grew up there with his mother, an astute businesswoman and popular hostess.

Ada would have a back-to-school tea for teachers every year. She told the granddaughters that when Reese was a young man, she told him to be there and speak to everyone. Obediently, he walked through the room of women wearing hats and gloves and sipping tea, and said, “hey” and left. Mrs. Blair’s subtle plan as a matchmaker for him were unrealized.

Living in one place for so long was a new concept to the Blair children. They were a military family, moving every few years, sometimes twice in one year, sometimes living in base housing, sometimes not. Change was normal. Their stability was their close-knit family.

JoAnn said being a military family taught them to be independent, to leave friends and schools, but to know they always had their family. "Dad was brilliant and loved school. He had several masters degrees and went through medical school in the army. When he was growing up, Granny Ada sent him to military school. He loved learning," JoAnn said. "He wanted to know everything about everything," Claudia said. A lot of people are surprised that he was also a movie buff. The children loved a report card they found that reprimanded him for being a jokester and talking in class.

Col. Blair met his wife, Claudia Barton, when he was teaching at the University of Alabama Medical School and she was his student. She completed her medical degree at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. "Our mother was one of four women in her graduating class," Claudia said. "That was so rare that her degree had to be hand-altered from "he" to "she."

A brilliant woman and much-loved pediatrician, she worked most of her career at Kirk Army Hospital in Maryland. Both Claudia and Reese had family members who never finished high school and both valued education. She was supportive of his gifts to any educational endeavor.

The Blair children were the recipients of their parents' knowledge and love of learning. JoAnn remembers that in the fourth grade, she was the only one who knew how to build an igloo.

"Dad was a frostbite expert and was researching wind chill technology. He always talked about what he was learning," she said. "We had watched the training films he produced to teach about layering clothing and how to make an igloo."

Karen said, and the others agreed, that their parents were always supportive of them and their ideas, "and we did have some crazy ideas sometimes." All the Blair offspring are lifelong learners. When they graduated from high school, it was expected that they would continue their education. College was not a question of whether, but where.

Claudia laughs and says that Montgomery County educated the Blair children. "As we looked back at records over the years, timber cuttings coincided with paying tuitions."

Since their arrival in Montgomery County, Karen and Claudia have taken classes at MCC and gotten help from the Small Business Center. "It was very helpful to learn what was involved in starting a business or non-profit," Karen said.

Col. Blair had spent 31 years in US Army, much of that time in research at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. After he retired, he did research for the Federal Energy Administration. "Stewardship of natural resources and the environment was a big part of his life," Claudia said.

When the trees in the N.C. mountains were dying in 1970s, he introduced Montgomery County to acid rain in a talk at MCC. Most of his audience had never heard of it. Bruce Turner was one of them. But, Bruce said, "Col. Blair explained it in terms that I could understand."

Bruce, one of the first employees at MTI, was director of continuing education when Col. Blair made the gift of the land. They had met by chance at Wimpy's in Troy when they shared a table at lunch one day. Their conversation was about MTI and what the college was trying to do for the county.

"He was a soft-spoken, humble, brilliant man. He was a futurist – one who could see far, far ahead. Without him, we would not have a community college in this county," Bruce said. "He rose to prominence in the U.S. Army, but he never forgot Montgomery County. His generosity sprang from respect for the people who live here."

After he moved back to Troy, Col. Blair was a frequent visitor to MCC. JoAnn remembers how proud he was of a huge raku pot he got when he met pottery instructor Mike Ferree. In 1986, Troy Mayor Roy Maness declared April 6 as Reese Blair Day, a day of appreciation for his generosity and contributions to needs in his beloved county. In addition to Montgomery Memorial Hospital and MCC, the list includes land for St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, Blair Park in Troy, and

land on River Road so the Law Enforcement Association could build a clubhouse, training area and firing range. Col. Blair said of public accolades in an interview, "I am a little reluctant, but I appreciate the gesture and the intent, and will go along with it." His philosophy was that life is a balance between what you give and what you get. One is entitled to meet the needs of self and family; then obligated to give of whatever resources one has to help his fellow man. "That does not merit special recognition," he said. As his health declined, JoAnn, her husband Ron and three children moved into the big house with him in August, 1988. "We came from Pennsylvania. When we got to Troy, it was 89-degrees at 9 p.m. I didn't know how I could take that," she said. Her love of the Blair House, as it had always been known, overcame her aversion to heat and humidity. Claudia and her husband, Jim, turned the family home into The Blair House Bed and Breakfast, which they successfully operated for 10 years. The house is now privately owned. None of the Blair sisters interviewed are really surprised that they have returned to their Blair roots in Montgomery County, which was an integral part of their lives. Col. Blair had instilled in them his love of "the greatest place on earth to live."

Claudia was appointed to the Board of Trustees by the county commissioners in 2008 and now serves as chairman. "I feel honored to serve on the MCC Foundation Board and the MCC Board of Trustees. It has given me great insight into the important role that the college plays for Montgomery County in education, economic development and leadership," she recently wrote. "Each time I walk into the board room and see my father's portrait above the plaque that he received at the dedication of Building 100, I know that he would be very proud of the way that his gift of land 44 years ago helped Montgomery County grow and be successful."



Col. Joseph Reese Blair with Dr. Claudia Blair and grandchildren (L-R) Matt and Bart Buthuis, and Alex Adams in the stroller, on one of the grandchildrens' visits to Troy in 1983.

# How to start a community college program

Bruce Turner, Phil Kissell and Ted Blake were early Montgomery Technical Institute employees who set up classes in response to community needs and requests, and worked on the specialty programs that has set MTI apart from the other 57 colleges in the system: Pottery, gunsmithing, taxidermy, metal engraving and forestry.

In interviews, each of them talked about the time spent and work involved in planning and preparing for every class offered at a technical college.

The first classes started in 1968 were Licensed Practical Nursing, Secretarial Science and Industrial Maintenance. Continuing Education taught Adult Basic Education and Adult High School.

The next year Pottery, Auto Mechanics, Carpentry, Welding, Radio/TV Repair and Electrical Technician classes started in Continuing Education and later became curriculum certificate/diploma programs.

Classes continued to be added and enrollment grew as more people asked for more programs.

First thing you need a group of "like-minded" people, said Bruce Turner.

In programs like nursing, accounting or welding or the dozen classes MTI started with, all you have to do is decide to offer the course, hire an instructor who will help write the curriculum and announce the schedule.

Specialty programs like pottery, gunsmithing, taxidermy, metal engraving and forestry take a long time, much research, many contacts in those fields, documented interest by prospective students, space available and convincing the state community college officials that these programs are good investments.

Programs like these are expensive to equip and maintain. Most began as continuing education programs with up to a dozen students interested in subject or skill.

It takes dedication, determination and time, sometimes years, to bring a program from an idea to classroom.

The first specialty program was pottery production.

Jesse Capel, first chairman of the Board of Trustees, said pottery was a natural for MTI.

"Pottery had a long history in this area. The industry was dying out except for a few of the older potters," he said.

Zedith Teague, of the famed Teague family, started the program at MTI. When she left to assist her ailing father at his shop, Mike Ferree took over the program and built it into one with international recognition.

Capel credits the MTI pottery program with revitalizing the pottery industry in Montgomery, Moore and Randolph counties.

Forestry was also seen as a natural for MTI with much of the county in the Uwharrie National Forest and the prominence of the lumber industry.

Forestry Skills began as a one-year diploma program with instructor David Isner and grew into one of the most successful programs at the college with a transfer agreement with NC State University for students who want to continue for a bachelor's degree.

Gunsmithing may have had to clear the most hurdles. It started as a Continuing Education class with a group of men who wanted to learn to build Kentucky Rifles, replicas of antique muzzle loaders, with instructors Frank Burton and Raeford Brown.

Bruce and the class members put together an advisory committee to lay the groundwork for a gunsmithing curriculum. They ignored the anti-gun movement and their research showed tremendous interest. MTI began the documentation and took their data to the Dept. of Community Colleges. Eventually, with endorsements from the N.C. Gun Collectors Association and political backing, the program was approved. With only one gunsmithing school in Pennsylvania east of the Mississippi in the U.S., the search was on for an instructor.

Jack McIntyre, MTI student, had graduated from the privately owned Pennsylvania Gunsmith School and recommended Gene Anderson, who taught there.

Anderson was reluctant to uproot his family, but the opportunity MTI offered convinced him to move.

The gunsmithing program soon had, and still has, a waiting list of applicants.

Taxidermy came soon after and then metal engraving was offered.

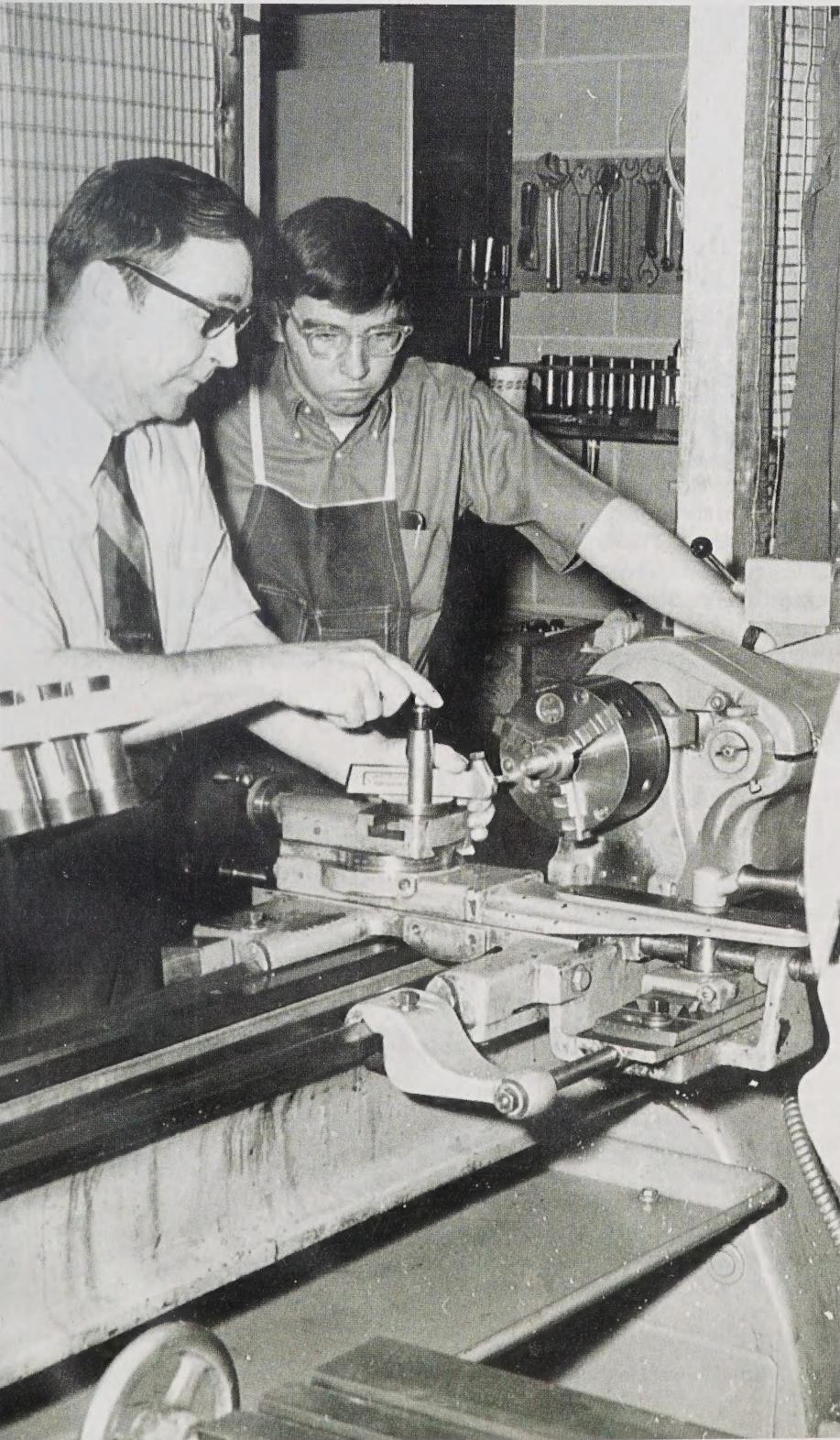
Some ideas, locksmithing for example, just never worked out.

MCC is still evolving as the educational needs change, but those "like-minded" people are still at work to keep the college growing.



*Early industrial sewing class in the annex building  
(old Montgomery Motors dealership that was  
replaced by the County Administration Building)*

*Early machine shop class  
with instructor Frank Lemonds*



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# David Bland

## First President



David H. Bland of Pittsboro, N.C. was named the first President of Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) by the Institute's Board of Trustees in February, 1968. The new technical institute was chartered in September, 1967 and started its first classes in July. Bland's first duties were to hire faculty and staff, and to determine the curricula for the fledgling institute. One of his earliest memories is of conducting classes "in an abandoned building" with a roof that leaked. MTI's administrative offices were located in the Board of Education building on Page Street in Troy, but classes were located wherever there was space. Before being hired by MTI, Bland was the Director of Adult Basic Education and Vocational-Technical Education at Durham Technical Institute. He received a B.A. degree from Wake Forest University, an M.A. degree from NC State University, and a doctorate in Community College Administration from NC State. He was working on his master's degree, commuting to Raleigh one night a week for classes when he learned that a new technical institute was looking for a president. One of his instructors, Ed Boone told him about the position at MTI and felt Bland would be a good fit for the new school. Shortly thereafter, Boone introduced Bland to the Chairman of the State Board of Education/Department of Community Colleges, Dallas Herring. "The rest is history," Bland said. Dallas Herring is credited with establishing the North Carolina Community College System with its open door policy and its mission to make post-secondary vocational technical education accessible to everyone. "I'll never forget being interviewed by Dallas Herring. If there was anyone that truly had the hopes and desires of North Carolina in his heart, Dallas Herring did. He was absolutely committed to making vocational/technical post-secondary and adult educational programs available throughout North Carolina. He really impressed on me that we were there to give skills to local people to get jobs," Bland said. Bland's commitment to that premise played out in his hiring practices and initial course offerings. The early programs in Electrical and Industrial Maintenance, Practical Nursing, Business Administration and Secretarial Science were all designed to put people to work. Bland was only 30 years old when he began to lead MTI and establish it in the community. That made him the youngest community college president in North Carolina at the time, an advantage, according to others working with him.

"We joked that we were just too young and too stupid not to know what we couldn't do," said Bruce Turner, a 40-year veteran of the college, and one of its first employees. There were many that believed the college could never survive. The determination of the staff, their belief that education could improve lives, and that anyone who wanted an

education should be able to have one, was what kept them pushing forward. "There was not a lot of knowledge of the school's founding or its purpose," said Bland. "Several staff members and I spent many days going about the county talking to people individually or to their respective clubs or churches. It really was an educational process for the county." In the early years, the institute had the most impact on individuals going back to school to get a high school diploma or GED®, or those attending adult self-interest classes which ran mainly in the evenings. "The long hours and the hard work of our staff developing and promoting our adult education programs gave the school its foundation in the county and was a lasting example of what the folks in Montgomery County had available. It was slow growth, but we were making a difference in peoples' lives," Bland said. "I think the first full year of operation our adult evening classes generated as many FTEs [full time equivalents] as the curriculum programs," Bland said. Enrollment, which generated state funding, was part of the difficulty in getting the programs off the ground. In order to support itself, a program had to have enough students to earn the funds from the state to pay for it.

"Equipping labs and workshops requires a major capital investment," said Bland. "It was difficult to make ends meet because we did not go outside the county to recruit people. We really did have a philosophy that the school was for Montgomery County," he said. That philosophy extended to inmates at the local prison. "We were one of the early schools to permit prisoners on campus," Bland said. According to Bruce Turner, inmates went through an interview and screening process. Those who were selected were bussed to MTI by the Department of Corrections.

"We had a full, six-hour welding class and also a machine shop class for inmates," said Turner. Culinary classes were held at the Montgomery Unit (a minimum security prison,) and used the kitchen facilities there. They also held literacy classes there. In explaining Bland's approach to building the institute, Turner said, "David Bland was a former Baptist minister. He approached his job with a missionary zeal - 'Do it for everybody and exclude nobody' - and he was able to bring on board people who had a similar feeling for the work." Bland left MTI June 30, 1971. During his tenure the institution grew from 68 to 258 FTEs. In a letter accepting Bland's resignation, MTI's Chairman of the Board, Jesse Capel, stated, "Occupational education has assumed an important place in the lives of Montgomery County's citizens . . . Thanks for introducing all of us to the many opportunities that exist at Montgomery Technical Institute."

Bland is now retired from Norment Security Group, Inc., where he served as Vice President. He resides in Raleigh with his wife Betty Atkins Bland, and says he is looking forward to coming back to Montgomery County to celebrate the college's 50th anniversary.





Congratulations  
**Montgomery Community College**  
for 50 years of service to the community

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# Montgomery Community College

*Making dreams come true  
for the past 50 years*

- Joan and Brady Dickson -

# Marvin Miles

## Second President

Marvin Miles was the second president of Montgomery Technical Institute and served the school and community for 12 years before he retired in 1983.

He is the only one of the five MCC presidents who is not alive to join the 50th anniversary celebration. He passed away in 2011 at the age of 86.

He was always "Mr. Miles," even to his closest associates, because he was held in such high regard. He was a humble man, but firm in his convictions, strong in his beliefs and protective of the college and employees.

Ted Blake, dean of instruction, said Miles was vocational education oriented, so he and MTI fit hand in glove.

He led the college through the construction of the first building on its own campus and an addition to the building as the college experienced tremendous growth during that time. New programs were added and existing ones expanded.

Blake said he and Miles spent hours at his kitchen table going over drawings for the original building and heavily re-designed it toward vocational education.

Jesse Capel, the first chairman of the board of trustees, recalled that Trustee John Kern, himself a contractor, agreed with the emphasis on vocational training and had the architect redraw the plans.

Blake recalled a conversation with Bruce Turner as they walked through the building almost daily during construction in 1977 and wondered if they would ever have enough students to fill the shops and classrooms.

"In just a couple of years, we were asking ourselves, 'Where are we going to put all these students?'"

In 1981, additional classrooms and shops and a shipping and receiving area were added to the original building.

Blake said Miles and the administration intentionally left the library open, without doors, to encourage people to walk through and become familiar with it.

### **Jesse Capel recalls hiring Marvin Miles.**

After David Bland, the first MTI president, resigned

in 1971, the trustees were searching for a new leader.

"We had a variety of applicants, including a couple who showed up with a banjo and a guitar," Capel laughs at the memory.

Like so many of the early employees have said, they were all new at the technical institute business, but shared the goals of community education and improving the lives of citizens.

Capel and the first board of trustees shared that vision and forged ahead.

"We didn't know much about technical institutes, but we knew what we wanted to do," Capel said. "We had to decide what to teach, find places for classes and find instructors. David Bland got us up and running and we needed a leader to go forward."

Mr. Miles, who was principal of Thomasville High School, had heard about the job and had inquired.

Late one afternoon, on his way back to Thomasville from the beach, Mr. Miles stopped by Capel Rugs in Troy and asked to see Capel.

"We talked and I was so impressed, I wanted Fred Taylor to meet him," Capel said. That was Fred Taylor Sr., who was chairman of the trustees personnel committee.

"So we walked across the street to Fred's office at Troy Lumber and talked with him. After Marvin left, we knew that was the man we needed. We recommended him to the board and he was hired," Capel said. "He was blessed with the leadership qualities so important to our technical institute."

Ted Blake said Miles was a man of wisdom, integrity and vision.

"He could see where we needed to be and how to get there," Blake said.



Capel said there has always been community involvement with the college and the board of trustees were actively involved during those growing years when Miles was president.

From the mid-1970s until Miles retired, MTI had a higher percentage of FTEs (full time equivalent hours) created through vocational courses than any other community college in the state.

"His leadership led the college to being what it is today," Blake said. "He was direct in his conversation, not much for small talk."

Miles' approach to build a staff also matched the trustees' and early employees': Work hard in the hiring process. Get the right people and let them do their jobs.

"He was not a hands-on manager, but he knew everything that was going on," Blake said. "We had a building full of good people who got along and worked together."

The bond referendum in 1974 was the key to the growth of MTI. The land had been donated by the Blair Family, but it was up to the county to raise the money to build a college.

Trustee J.F. Allen headed the bond committee and the citizens of Montgomery County stepped up.

"Ours was the only educational bond issue passed that year. The referendum was held on a Saturday and passed by 61 votes," said Capel.

Blake recalled that passage looked bleak in a recession with mills closing, but every employee was out campaigning.

Blake said the involvement of county citizens from the beginning had put everyone under the umbrella of collective ownership of the college.

In 1972, MTI had added auto mechanics with instructors Wilson Freeman and Jack Caldwell, air conditioning taught by Mike Anderson and the one-year diploma production pottery program taught by Zedith Teague.

Students were already earning diplomas in light construction, taught by Harry McRae and the electrical installation and maintenance program taught by Bob Roberts.

In 1973, Jim Thomas started teaching the one-year diploma autobody program and early childhood started in a rented house in Troy, which is still a daycare center, now privately operated as Little Friends.

The first instructor in the criminal justice diploma program was Steve Link and after the first year, was headed by Bob Qualls for the next two decades.

In 1975, the first class of emergency medical technicians graduated. In a few years, the majority of EMTs in North Carolina had been trained at MTI.

The college moved into the new building on its own campus in 1977, the same year the MTI Foundation was chartered.

In 1978, MTI took on one of its most challenging courses and began gunsmithing as a curriculum program, the second on the East Coast and the second one nationwide in a community college. Genc Anderson, recruited from Pennsylvania Gunsmith School, walked into a room with work benches built out from the walls and 12 red vises.

The one-year diploma taxidermy program, taught by Bill Murchison, was started in the early 1980s.

The staff, backed by Mr. Miles and the trustees, set out to equip the most expensive program MTI had by taking hand-me-down shop machinery from other colleges, getting military surplus and asking major manufacturers for donations.

Enrollment was never a problem. There was a waiting list almost immediately, and gunsmithing remains one of the signature programs at MCC.

Another first for MTI was on the academic side when Gardner-Webb College (now University) started holding classes on campus. That gave MTI, which became Montgomery Technical College in 1983, the first in the state to provide the opportunity for students to earn a bachelor's degree on a community college campus.

In 1983, after 33 years in education, Marvin Miles decided to retire to enjoy his family, especially his grandchildren, fishing and his beloved mountains. He was a native of Colorado and graduated from high school in Norwood, Colo.

During World War II, he served in the European Theater with the U.S. Army's 13th Airborne Division.

He continued his education in North Carolina with his undergraduate degree from Catawba College, his Master's Degree in Education Administration from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and did advanced educational study at Duke University.

He taught and coached basketball, baseball and football during his public school teaching career in Anson, Richmond and Davidson counties before coming to MCC.

Miles was also a licensed Baptist minister and frequently filled local pulpits for special occasions and as an interim pastor.

Blake and Miles remained close. Blake said after Miles retired, he especially enjoyed visiting his brothers in Colorado, Arizona and Alaska.

His wife, Mary, beloved by the entire MTI community, died within a year after he passed.

# Benny Hampton

## Third President

Dr. Benny Hampton's nearly nine-year tenure as the third president of Montgomery Community College was a time of transition for the community college system and for Montgomery Technical College (MTC).

The name change from Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) in 1983 was shortly before Hampton arrived and four years later, the name would be changed again to Montgomery Community College.

After Hampton earned his doctorate degree in adult and community college education from N.C. State University, in 1981, he was contacted by several colleges as a presidential candidate, but was in no hurry to leave Randolph Community College where he had nearly 18 years invested, starting as an agricultural business instructor, then director of industrial education and was then dean of continuing education.

"Some folks in Montgomery County contacted me that Marvin Miles was going to retire and suggested that I apply," Hampton said. "That intrigued me because MTC had strong vocational and technical programs and that was where my interests and background were."

Hampton grew up on a farm in Surry County, worked on the dairy farm at N.C. State University while he earned his degree in agricultural education. He taught vocational agriculture in Alamance County for three years and continued his own education at NCSU for a master's in education degree in agricultural education and his doctoral degree.

When Hampton went to work at MTC on Feb. 1, 1984, he walked into the president's office knowing that major changes, and the attendant confusion, were coming and that programs and personnel would be affected.

• The N.C. Department of Community Colleges had established uniform standards for all curriculum programs throughout the system and mandated college degrees for all administrators and lead instructors.

"This was really difficult. Most of the programs at MTC were in good shape, but we did have to upgrade some and drop some," Hampton said. "Also, we had people who had been doing a great job for years, but didn't have the bachelor's degree that was a requirement under the new standards."

Community colleges had two years, until 1985, to put the new standards in place. Some employees got the necessary degrees. Some left the system. Many were unhappy. Work schedules and class scheduling changed.

Gardner Webb College offered bachelor's degrees in a limited number of majors on campus. Others commuted to four-year colleges in Greensboro and Charlotte.

Hampton said following

mandates was not a popular position to be in.

• The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) had made recommendations to maintain MTC's accreditation.

• At the same time, textile mills were closing in the county which changed the focus of many vocational courses and set the stage for retraining of newly unemployed workers.

"One of the first things we did was survey business and industry to identify their needs. In a way, it was like starting over," Hampton said. Staff committees were formed to evaluate every program and make recommendations. As usual, budgets were tight.

"We were always strapped for funds of all kinds, especially equipment and salaries and could not use salary funds for equipment or vice-versa. That often tied our hands trying to hire the best instructors and have up-to-date equipment to train students," Hampton said. "We had to bring in overlapping classes, such as machining and welding, that were required in several vocational programs. We also had to justify to the state that a graduate who went to work as a machinist, for example, didn't have to be labeled as a machinist to have the skills."

The digital age

• MTC got its first computer in the business office, where fortunately, Hampton said, Ann Tarleton "spoke its language."

"We have to anticipate change all the time, but so many changes going on at once, especially computers, was overwhelming," Hampton said. "We knew computers were changing the way industries operated, the way businesses did business and even the farming industry. The training would have to begin in the education system."

His only experience had been with key punch in graduate school at N.C. State, so he had to learn to use the computer along with everybody else. Workshops were held to train employees first and the budget had to be stretched to build a computer lab.

MTC had led the state in regional recruiting

By that time, regional programming, which allowed recruiting outside the county of residence, had been approved by the community college system.

MTC was already ahead.

"MTC had been very innovative to put in programs that would attract students from out of the county because these programs helped support the other programs. Pottery and gunsmithing were established. Metal engraving and taxidermy were in the works," Hampton said.

Forestry came on the list of natural fits for Montgomery County

*New look for a cold day  
Benny Hampton was never sensitive about being bald. He took the kidding with his usual good nature. When he came to MTC in 1984, the staff gave him a welcoming reception and his former secretary sent a gag gift - an out-of-style blonde wig. She loved wigs. We kidded her about her wigs and she kidded me about being bald," he said.*

*The reception was in early February. Jokingly, Benny said he would wear the wig to school on the first day the temperature dropped below zero. "I thought that was a safe bet that late in the winter," he recalls, laughing. "But lo and behold, the temperature plummeted early in March to below zero. I showed up to work wearing my blonde wig hat."*



# How the Forestry Program got a living forest

*Being a farm boy, one of the first things Dr. Benny Hampton did after becoming president of MCC was to walk the property.*

*"I knew we had a large tract of land, but were using only about 25 acres. All of it had been clear-cut and the best investment would be timber," Hampton said. "I talked with J.F. Allen, who was chairman of the trustees, and Fred Taylor at Troy Lumber about the best way to do it.*

*The problem was we didn't have the money." A few weeks later, out of the blue, Hampton got a surprise call from Monsanto Chemical Co.*

*"They were looking for about one-hundred acres to plant to test a forest chemical product," Hampton said. "I couldn't believe it! The N.C. and U.S. forest services agreed to plant the loblolly pines in six tracts and the MCC trustees approved the project."*

*Tree farming takes patience.*

*As the trees grew, Monsanto conducted its tests, moved on and left the trees.*

*"It couldn't have worked out better," Hampton said. "The tree farm became a living laboratory for the forestry program."*

and happened when Hampton was approached by Carlyle Franklin, a friend from NCSU School of Forestry, to start a program.

MTC set up a one-year diploma forestry course with David Eisner as the first instructor. Like gunsmithing, forestry was immediately popular and is now an associate degree program with transfer credits to NCSU School of Forestry.

Training for industry

In 1987, all technical institutes and colleges in North Carolina were designated community colleges and MTC became MCC.

With assistance from Leon Neil from the N.C. Alternative Energy Corp., MCC was able to build an industry training facility with a training project for heat pump installation and repair.

Drawing on his experience at RCC with training programs for Goodyear and Cleveland Twist Drill, Hampton was able to get 10 heat pumps donated from the top 10 HVAC manufacturers so students could train on each one.

To get top qualified instructors, Hampton went to the HVAC industry association, which shared the salary costs with MCC.

To establish a curriculum, Hampton got industry officials to meet every week for several months to answer the question: "What do our graduates need to know to go to work for you?" The new course plan was written from this effort.

"We had people from every county in the state training at MCC. It was the greatest project we had directly involved with industry," Hampton said.

When that program was no longer viable, that area of the building, which included a maintenance and storage area, was renovated as classrooms for the forestry program and other classes cramped for space.

In 1988, MCC added, through continuing education, a certificate program in paramedic and intensive nursing that trained many emergency service responders throughout the state.

In 1990, pottery production, with instructor Mike Ferree, moved into its own building on campus as that program continued to attract students from all over the U.S. and other countries.

Bruce Turner had brought numerous experts in various fields to lead workshops and seminars in the specialty programs. One that stands out in Hampton's memory was in 1991 when Lynton McKenzie from Australia held a week long seminar for metal engravers at MCC.

"MCC's special programs brought in experts who were tops in their fields. They attracted the attention that educated the public and promoted these programs that helped support all the other programs," Hampton said.

In 1992, the Department of Community Colleges and the N.C. Board of Education made MCC the pilot program for one-year college transfer.

More battles to fight

Along with success came obstacles.

A conflict on the State Board of Nursing resulted in a threat to close MCC's nursing program that Hampton resolved.

An ongoing battle with the state was the value of FTEs, the full time equivalent hours upon which the colleges were funded.

"The system was its own worst enemy. If we dropped a student, even a failing student, we lost FTEs. We were finally able to strengthen the entrance requirements, which was necessary in some programs that require real interest, dedication and commitment from the students," Hampton said.

In 1989, Hampton was appointed chairman of the President's Association Personnel Committee with the assignment to develop a funding structure that would be more fair to colleges of all sizes.

MCC was the smallest, and briefly the second smallest, college in the system. The committee's recommendations were adopted in 1992, Hampton's last year at MCC.

"I never got to provide more adequate funding to the faculty and staff. That fell to the next administration," Hampton said.

In 1992, MCC was allocated funds to build what is now Building 200, which houses offices and a large multi-purpose room.

Preliminary plans had to be submitted to the state within three days, so Hampton stayed up all night, drawing the building MCC needed. Frank Kersey was trustee chairman, so they got approved by the MCC board.

After leaving MCC, Hampton followed his dream of an agriculture-related business, something he always had in the back of his mind for retirement.

Montgomery Farm & Garden has become a successful business in Troy.

In 1998, Hampton was appointed to the MCC Board of Trustees by the county commissioners and served four years. He requested not to be re-appointed.

Now he is semi-retired again as his son, Bryant, has taken over day-to-day operation of the business.

Every fall, Montgomery Farm & Garden and Case Knives sponsor a Small Town USA festival in Troy to celebrate rural living.





# Dr. Ted Gasper

## Fourth President

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Dr. Theodore H. Gasper was the fourth president of Montgomery Community College. He began his official duties on March 15, 1993 and served until July 15, 1998. A native of Florence, South Carolina, Gasper graduated with a B.A. degree from Dakota State College, an M.S. degree from South Dakota State University, and a doctorate in education from the University of Kentucky.

During his tenure at MCC, Gasper helped to integrate technology on campus and into the classroom. A bond approval prior to his appointment resulted in new construction on MCC's campus. Gasper's vision for a new technology building resulted in the 44,500 square foot Business, Industry, Technology Resource Center (Building 200), which was the only building of its kind on community college campuses at the time. The first T1 fiber optic lines were brought on campus to facilitate high speed internet access, integrating the technology into each of the Center's classrooms. It also allowed for MCC's library to access hundreds of databases around the state to increase its offerings to students.

Gasper's focus on technology brought distance education to MCC. The College became one of the locations for the North Carolina Information Highway, where classes could be transmitted or received with live audio, video, and data. In addition, the first online classes were created while he was president. After five years of service, Gasper left MCC to take a position as president of Halifax Community College in July 1998.

THE CAPEL FAMILY  
CONGRATULATES  
MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
ON  
FIFTY WONDERFUL YEARS

*Julianne and Jesse  
Nancy and Leon  
Gelynda and Arron*



# Dr. Mary Kirk

## Fifth President

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Becoming a community college president was not a burning ambition for Dr. Mary Powell Kirk. It was a calling.

The fifth president of Montgomery Community College, Mary Kirk had the longest presidential tenure in its first 50 years. She led the college through unprecedented growth as the school firmly established itself with signature programs unique to the community college system.

Mary came to MCC where five stressful years had left employees with low morale in a climate of distrust.

Former vice-president Bruce Turner had served as interim president and had restored equanimity and an atmosphere of trust.

The board of trustees made a more than usual thorough and meticulous search for a president. Trustee Chair Gelynda Capel said Mary Kirk kept rising to the top. "As we went through every item on our criteria, she came out on top every time," Mrs. Capel said. "When we met her for the first interview, Mary was just as delightful as we had anticipated."

Ted Blake, former MCC administrator and trustee who was on the presidential search committee, said, "Mary Kirk came in like fresh breeze. Her professional attitude, her upbeat, gregarious nature and genuine love for community colleges was exactly what we needed."

Mary said the day she was hired as MCC president was one of the happiest in her life. "It was the opportunity of a lifetime and I was so lucky to have it," she said. "I was also fortunate to work at a college that had maintained a good work relationship with the county commissioners and the state legislature."

When Mary came to MCC in May 1999, full-time equivalent students were between 500-600. During her tenure, enrollment nearly doubled, the pottery building was enlarged, a new building for the forestry program was constructed, the nursing program expanded and the dental assisting program was started. Another signature program, hunting and shooting sports management program was started during her tenure. She procured a total of \$175,000 in grants to get the hunting and shooting sports program started. It is the only program of its kind in the country.

"I had an absolute dream board of trustees. For the entire 15 years. They worked so very hard for MCC and in the community and let me venture out on many ideas," Mary said. "Obviously, Gelynda Capel, and Earle Connelly were such strong leaders as officers of the board but so were all the board members. I want to name them all! They were the foundation holding me up and friends that I have missed greatly. So many have passed away but what a legacy they leave behind."

Kathy Harris, vice-president of student service, now retired said, "Dr. Kirk was one of the most energetic people I have ever known and her brain worked 24 hours each day. She would often tell the administrative cabinet that she had "the most amazing idea" at 2 a.m. in the morning."

Harris said those amazing ideas often caused the staff to "think outside the box" and as a team, the faculty and staff accomplished quite a number of feats during Dr. Kirk's tenure. Mary's energy is legendary at MCC. Her genuine love and affection for students made her an approachable president. She was the first to laugh at a joke on herself. Take the "kiss a pig" event. It was a fundraiser for student activities.

"They had jars out with names on them and the person who collected the most money would kiss a pig on the Spring Fun Day, The trustee board had deep pockets and filled up my jar." Mary laughs her infectious laugh. "It was a cute little piglet. I have kissed worse."

Kathy Harris said called Dr. Kirk "a students' president" who could be found hunting deer with students, participating in the Forestry competitions, supporting students at the SGA conferences, taking a pie in the face at the SGA's Spring Fling, and attending the NRA Shot Shows with gunsmithing students. "She was literally "everywhere" working for and supporting MCC," Kathy said. All that came naturally to Mary. She grew up a fishing-hunting-water sports girl in Polk County and never lost her love and appreciation for the outdoors. "My love of camping did get tested at a forestry competition in Pisgah National Forest," she said. "The temperature dropped and I have never been so cold in my life! I was praying for 5 a.m. when we could get up and make coffee."

Mary's leadership was not only on campus. She believed that it was her duty to be involved in the community as an advocate for the college. She served on numerous boards and advisory committees and took each responsibility seriously. "I believe that you have to know the county and municipal leaders and the agencies to understand what their dreams and visions are," she said. "Bob Jordan was always there as a mentor and knew I had his support for the college. It was easier when I first came with legislators like Aaron Plyler and Bill Purcell, with an economy



*'They had jars out with names on them and the person who collected the most money would kiss a pig on the Spring Fun Day, The trustee board had deep pockets and filled up my jar.' Mary laughs her infectious laugh. 'It was a cute little piglet. I have kissed worse.'*

that was kinder to the county." Mary said.

Mary Chesson, former instructor at MCC who was currently working at Randolph Community College, came back to MCC while Dr. Kirk was president and served as interim president when Dr. Kirk retired. Mary Chesson said Dr. Kirk never did anything by half, but threw all she had into her commitment to the school, her community and the community college system. "She was indefatigable in promoting MCC, being its ambassador 24/7. The one word that always comes to mind when I think of Mary Kirk is energy – goodness, that woman could make me tired."

When students and staff heard singing or whistling in the hallways, they knew it was Dr. Kirk. "Even when I didn't feel good, I tried to be cheerful. Nobody wants to be around a dark cloud," she said.

Dr. Kirk said her life experiences had given her the opportunities to know firsthand what people go through every day and how much something as simple as a smile can motivate and uplift them. She has been a caregiver, a single mother, worked two jobs to make ends meet and worked her way through three college degrees. When her daughters, Kathryn and Kristin were pre-schoolers, she married Charles Kirk and they became a family. Dr. Kirk was not only known for her endless energy, but also for her generosity. "Mary was always gregarious, and she enjoyed interacting with students and strolling the campus to take the pulse of the college. Mary loved to give gifts for any occasion, and I think about that when I realize the biggest gift she gave to MCC was herself and her talents," Mary Chesson said.

Dr. Kirk said she was encouraged by so many employees from all departments. "They all made MCC what it is today through their hard work and dedication, through their belief in what the college stood for. Again, there are so many I want to name but won't for fear of leaving someone out! "But I would be remiss if I didn't talk about my colleague, Mary Chesson, who came on board with her sleeves rolled up and ran with me on so many ideas. I am glad I still get to work with her."

But, Dr. Kirk was not superhuman. Fatigue and sadness took a toll when she became the caregiver for her terminally ill mother. Her friends and colleagues, many of whom had faced similar situations, stood by her with emotional support.

Mary Kirk was all about raising money for scholarships and soliciting equipment and materials for programs. She laughs again at her boldness. "Oh, the countless people I haggled to buy raffle tickets and donate to the college - I am so grateful they didn't hang up the phone or run away when they saw me coming." Wayne Bernauer, now retired head of the gunsmithing department, recalled that Mary accompanied his staff and students to the annual SHOT show in Las Vegas almost every year.

"She never knew a stranger, ever. I could take her with me places and she was always shaking hands. People always wanted to give us stuff when she was around. She really had the respect of Frank and Pete Brownell. After she retired they always asked me how she was doing," Wayne said. "Over the course of her presidency, she got us probably \$600,000 – to three-quarters of a million dollars for the gunsmithing program." In years when the college budget was tight, Mary would pay her own way and work the whole time she was there, Wayne added. Mary said the students who went to the show knew their jobs, working the MCC booth, greeting visitors and talking about their MCC experience.

"They knew they had better work – and better stay out of trouble," Mary said. They also knew that Mary was capable of tough love. The MCC Foundation was dear to her heart. "MCC had an established foundation when I came. It was wonderful. One of the highlights every year was awarding scholarships," she said. "I never wanted to see students in debt when they graduated."

The students at MCC made the greatest impact on her life, Mary said. "The amazing students and the opportunities and joys and sometimes heartache they provided! Watching them succeed and knowing I was a part of that success was the greatest reward!"

Mary and her husband, Charles, established two endowed Foundation scholarships: Mary P. and Charles T. Kirk and, in honor and memory of her parents, Fred H. and Louise A. Powell.

"When I graduated from college, working in education was not a consideration. It wasn't until I went to work at Carteret Community College that I found my niche," Mary said.

After she graduated from UNC Greensboro with a degree in office administration/business education, Mary worked for several corporations but continued her education with courses and certifications in COBOL and other technology areas, paralegal, salesmanship and painting. At Carteret Community College, she said, she realized the importance of community colleges and, during her 15 years there, advanced in the administration to dean of instruction and had been director of the college foundation. She also served a year as interim president. "As I was thinking how much the college touched peoples' lives, I kept telling myself I would like to head a college. Then one day I said, 'I will do this' and went back to college to prepare myself," she said.

She earned her masters degree in adult education from East Carolina University and her Ed.D degree in higher education/adult and community college from N.C. State University. As MCC went through several SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) re-accreditations while Mary was president, she became interested in the accreditation process. She served on several teams that visited other colleges with the mission to assure the educational quality and improve their effectiveness. When she was offered a position as vice-president at SACS Commission on Colleges in 2015, Mary assessed her tenure at MCC and decided it was time to make a change and retire. Her retirement reception was a celebration of good memories and shared laughs. The board of trustees parting gift was a candy-apple red Harley-Davidson Dyna Low Rider. She loved it and had a kind word and a hug for every one of the several hundred people who stopped by to wish her well.

"She is a most unique person," trustee Claudia Bulthuis said at the time. "Mary has this ability to relate to anybody and to inspire each one of them." In an interview at the time, Mary said, "I know that God opens doors for us and I didn't want to hear that door close and regret not going through it."

In her last interview for this profile, Mary was in the Atlanta airport waiting for her plane to El Paso to evaluate a college seeking accreditation. She said the early college high school was one of her dreams for MCC and she was thrilled to know it was happening.

"I want people to know how wonderful MCC is and to do everything they can to protect her and appreciate her. She is so worth it." Mary echoed the comments of many that the many good, unique people who built and worked at MCC was the reason for its success.

I will always carry part of them in my heart and soul," she said." Mary said MCC had changed her and made her a better person. "MCC made my dream of being a president come true. I grew in so many ways professionally and was able to work at both the local and state level. I believe that everyone I came in contact with left an impression in my heart and mind. And I have met and worked with so many incredible people who believed in our 'community'

# Chad Bledsoe

## Sixth President

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Chad Bledsoe was born and raised in Surry County. His mother was an educator, his father a professional potter and gallery owner. There was a heavy emphasis on education at home and so Chad and his only sibling, Christy, both pursued college degrees.

Chad earned his B.S. in business at Western Carolina University, then went into the family business as a manager of Winterfire Galleries in Western North Carolina.

In 1999, Chad started his M.B.A./CIS at Appalachian State University and was later accepted into a doctoral program at Auburn University. It appeared that working in education was not in his career plan until Chad began teaching computer classes as a graduate student. He enjoyed the experience and thought he'd stay with the university when a family friend who worked at Wilkes Community College encouraged Chad to apply at a community college.

"He extolled the virtues of community colleges so much that he convinced me to apply," Chad said. "Instead of going to Auburn, I started teaching at Wake Tech and never looked back."

Chad said that although the courses he taught at Wake were the same as those he taught at Appalachian, the difference was like night and day.

"When the lightbulb goes on for the community college student, you know you're making a difference. You have a much greater impact teaching at a community college," Chad said. "The faculty and staff are different, too. They are more committed to student success and less to their personal agendas. It's just a better environment," he said.

From there, Chad worked in various positions at Wilkes, Surry, Haywood and Western Piedmont community colleges, and earned his doctorate in higher education administration from UNC-Greensboro in 2008. Chad's education and work experience made him an outstanding candidate for the position as MCC's president, but it was his background that made him uniquely suited for it.

"In my family we had a small business mentality. I worked with my dad in his business and my mom was an educator. The people at MCC are like that. They are well-grounded and down-to-earth. MCC is a small institution. Like a small business, it has to work hard to get things done. It's in a community of people who work hard. So many schools don't have that sense of independence and importance to the community like Montgomery Community College has. The college makes a difference in this community. It has an impact not only on the students, but on the people who live and work here," Chad said. "I couldn't have picked a better fit for me."

According to MCC's chairman of the board, Claudia Bulthuis, there couldn't have been a better fit for the college, either.

"Chad Bledsoe was the right person at the right time when he became president of Montgomery Community College. He is uniquely equipped to oversee the changes that are in progress to take MCC into its next 50 years," she said.

Before coming to MCC, Chad had done his research, and for the most part, MCC was what he expected.

"From a technical standpoint, MCC was what I expected. From a personal standpoint, it was more than I could have hoped for. Coming in, you look at everything, you do the research, but you can't always know about the people. The people at MCC are a very close-knit group and they're more committed to what they do than most of the places I've seen. I'm very happy and very lucky to be here," Chad said.

He credits the positive relationships he has with county government and the county school system as being another reason he enjoys being at MCC.

"We all care about education and want to do what's right for the students and we respect each other for it," Chad said.

Chad came into the position in April 2015 and in two years, several major changes have taken place in the county and in the college. In March 2016 the

Connect NC Bond passed, providing MCC with \$6.3 million in funds to update facilities, infrastructure and equipment so it can better serve the community. Site work has begun for the new central high school and MCC will share a technical center with the high school on that campus. Montgomery County Early College High School accepted its first 125 students on MCC's campus in August 2017 and recruiting is now taking place for the next group coming in the fall of 2018.

Two new college transfer degrees, Associate in Fine Arts: Music, and Associate in Engineering were added and are now available. An Associate Degree in Nursing is currently in its final approval stage with the N.C. Board of Nursing. The gunsmithing program expanded with the help of a Golden Leaf Grant to accept up to 30 additional students, making MCC's gunsmithing program the largest in the nation. New programs have been added, others expanded, and the college now occupies new space in Biscoe with its HVAC program.

Chad said his plan over the next few years is to continue to focus on three general areas: technical programs, specialty programs and general education.

"We've already expanded the welding program and we're looking at meeting more of the needs of employers in the community," Chad said. "We've added forging and knife making to our heritage crafts program and tripled the number of NRA classes for next year. We're still going to need to focus on general education classes for our citizens, but I think we'll see more students getting in, getting what they need, then getting out much faster," he said.

Included on the wish list for new programs is dental hygiene and fish and wildlife.

Chad says that being flexible and helping students to meet their goals as quickly as possible will be the way of education in the future. He added, "MCC's positive relationships and commitment to student success will be what drives us into the next 50 years."



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# Jesse Capel

## Trustee



In the mid-1960s, a group of Montgomery County men who valued education and recognized the need for job training after high school, and for a way for adults to earn a high school diploma, joined together to get a technical institute for Montgomery County.

There was a movement in North Carolina at that time to create community colleges, so the time was right to act.

In 1967, Montgomery Technical Institute was formally organized and the group of businessmen, educators that had done the groundwork was appointed as the first Board of Trustees.

Among them was a young man named Jesse Capel.

Harold Scott had approached Mr. Capel and asked him to chair the board.

"I was honored to accept," he said.

"I was honored to serve and am proud of what Montgomery Community College has accomplished from our vision 50 years ago."

At age 34, Capel was the youngest board chair in the state and the most dedicated. An avid advocate of education, Capel served MTI and the citizens of the county for 16 years, through the formative years and the first two presidents, Dr. David Bland and Marvin Miles.

"None of us were quite sure what a technical institute was, but we knew we wanted to train people for jobs and give them opportunities to learn about whatever interested them," Mr. Capel said. "We started with a vision of where we wanted to go and made a tentative plan on how to get there. First, we had to decide what to teach, find instructors, find places for classes and find a home for our college."

In September 1967, Capel, Eddie B. Coleman, Robert L. Liles and Hubert Moss were appointed by the county Board of Commissioners.

That same year, John Kern, Fredrick Leslie Taylor, Harold A. Scott and J. C. McRae were appointed by the county Board of Education.

The governor's appointments to make up a full board were made in December 1971. Edgar A. Anderson, Eleanor Chappell, Ann Kirk and Charles Bruton were appointed by Gov. Robert Scott.

Fred Taylor chaired the personnel committee, Jeff Allen was chair of the election committee and John Kern was chair of the building committee.

Mr. Capel said they were blessed with the first administrators who just as committed to education as the trustees, and quite a few stayed with the school until they retired. The trustees hired the presidents and depended on them to hire the staff.

"Presidents David Bland and Marvin Miles were just the people we needed at the time," he said. "Mr. Bland, led us through the early years of getting established and educating the community on what a technical institute could do for the county. Mr. Miles, had the leadership qualities essential for a technical institute. He was a firm believer in technical education and took us through the construction of our campus and a time of tremendous growth."

Mr. Capel recalled that, in the beginning, as they began to structure courses, the board looked at all the possibilities, assessed the needs in the county and sometimes relied on their own judgement as to which courses would be most beneficial. Some took off and grew, some failed for lack of interest and enrollment. They made adjustments as necessary.

"We were doing everything for the first time. There was no guidebook, but we had an enthusiastic board which wanted to have a school that would give the people the most education for their money. MTI had to meet the needs of the people," he said.

Montgomery Technical Institute was chartered by the N.C. Board of Education in 1971, but classes, instructors and a small administrative staff had been at work since 1968.

"At the time MTI was chartered, about 25 county citizens were enrolled in community colleges in neighboring counties. Within a few years, we had over 2,000 county citizens involved in something at MTI, some enrolled in full time courses, some in GED (for an adult high school diploma) and some in Continuing Education classes," Mr. Capel said. "We were all proud of the community response. It showed us that people did want to learn when they had the opportunity."

The first classes were in the old Ford dealership building, called the Annex by MTI students and staff, in Troy. At that time, he said, Montgomery County produced half the socks sold in the U.S. and the mills needed skilled and trained knitting machine fixers. This was a base to get started on impacting employment.

"The immediate impact on employment was in the knitting industry, training knitting machine fixers. Several industries put knitting machines in the annex for training and fixers had no problem getting jobs," Capel said.

From the beginning, Capel Inc. and several other county employers would pay the tuition for every employee who wanted to take a class in any subject at MTI.

"We recognized that anyone who was trying to better themselves made better employees," Mr. Capel said. "Nothing was ever promised to anyone, but those who took classes often became department leaders and superintendents because of the business and leadership skills they had learned. More education gave them a better base for supervision."

GED got a lot of people involved in MTI and led into more education for many of them.

Bruce Turner and Chuck Marsh introduced the county citizens to the college by setting up classes in unlikely places to teach any craft or skill that people in that neighborhood wanted to learn.

From 1971-1983, Marvin Miles and the Board of Trustees led the college through a building a "home" for the college and adding numerous programs through a period of rapid growth and national attention for programs that were a "natural" for the college due to the rural setting.

The proximity to Seagrove and its reputation for pottery going back two centuries, pottery was another natural for MTI.

Mr. Capel credits MTI with revitalizing the local pottery industry.

"I think we saved pottery in North Carolina. There were no up and coming young potters. Clay was a resource we had on our doorsteps, so it was obvious we should have a pottery course."

Zedith Teague, of the acclaimed Teague family of pottery, started the program in 1972 and taught for two years until she left to assist her ailing father in his pottery.

Capel said when Mike Ferree came in as production pottery instructor in 1973, he brought an artistic element to studio pottery.

"He (Ferree) has an enormous amount of talent and skill," Capel said. "The pottery industry was impacted as graduates were in demand to work as apprentices in the established potteries."

The original trustees saw their vision of a "home" for the college with the donation of land for a campus and a bond issue that provided the funds to construct the first building.

That was the only education bond issue passed in 1974.

Mr. Capel said J.F. Allen, one of the original trustees, was instrumental in getting the bond passed.

"No one else could have done it," Mr. Capel said.

The vote was on a Saturday and it passed by 61 votes.

"We were deeply grateful to the Blair family for donating the land for the college. Without it, we may not have passed the bond issue to build MCC's campus, starting with the first building that brought the curriculum programs under one roof," Mr. Capel said.

The original plans went through several revisions to have a more practical building. Trustee and contractor John Kern and Mr. Capel had the architect redraw the plans.

The impact of MTI was also felt in the business community when employees came trained in basic office skills. Basic Law Enforcement graduates were working in local law enforcement. Mechanics, carpenters and air conditioning technicians were being hired.

The nursing program, started by Shirley Jenkins BSN, was highly successful and provided trained licensed practical nurses for hospitals, medical offices and nursing homes.

With a building in place with proper classrooms, shops and labs, MTI added new programs, notably gunsmithing and later on, metal engraving, taxidermy and forestry that were considered natural fits for the area and brought national attention to the college.

"Gunsmithing took a lot of work to get approval, but we had a lot of support from the firearms industry and it was immediately successful," Mr. Capel said. "We were able to recruit an outstanding instructor, Gene Anderson, and MTI staff worked tirelessly to equip the shops. I recall they even got some equipment from the Department of Defense. I was not directly involved, but I knew what was going on and how hard the administration and instructors worked to get what they needed."

As the community college system evolved, funding for the school changed to get a lump sum budget based on FTE (full time equivalent hours), which Capel said was an incentive to offer classes people wanted to take and to have at least 12 students enrolled in every class.

More four-year colleges began accepting credits for community college courses and people began to realize they could save a lot of money by taking their first two years of college at a community college.

"Initially, there was some resistance to the college transfer, especially the two-year transfer because people thought MTI would abandon vocational training," Mr. Capel said. "That didn't happen. We never wanted to lose the vocational school aspect at MTI. The transfer program saved county families a lot of money."

Four-year colleges began to report that transfer students got better grades and were better students. That was because they were more mature, more motivated and serious about their education."

Mr. Capel is also proud that during his 16 years on the board, there was never a lawsuit filed against MTI. "We had a grievance system in place that took any issue all the way to the Board of Trustees."

When Marvin Miles retired in 1983, Mr. Capel retired from the Board of Trustees.

"I didn't want to appear to be building a dynasty. We had accomplished all the goals of the first trustees and I felt it was a good time to step down," Mr. Capel said. "I miss being involved with the college. It is such a good thing for Montgomery County."



## *Small town living and loyalty*

*Capel Rugs, as the company is locally known, is now an international importer and exporter of high end rugs and continues to manufacture their signature braided rugs in Troy:*

*Jesse Capel loves this story told by his father, company founder A. Leon Capel Sr.*

*Leon founded the company in 1917 when he realized that tractors would make the plow lines he was making obsolete. He had the ingenuity to change his business from making plow lines and bought sewing machines to make those plow lines into reversible braided rugs.*

*During the depression Leon Capel ran into hard times as everyone did. He once offered one of his employees, Kell Brown, a cow in place of his wages if Mr. Brown would continue working until the business finances improved. Mr. Brown said he appreciated the offer, but he couldn't afford to feed the cow, so he would just keep working and Mr. Capel could pay him as much as he was able until things improved.*

*Capel Rugs still has that kind of loyalty and some employees have worked at the mill in Troy for up to 50 years.*

*"We believe that a person should keep working as long as they want to. It's not healthy to retire and stop working, so we make adjustments to schedules and work loads to let employees keep working," Mr. Capel said. "We also have third and fourth generation employees now. This is flattering to us. We believe in fair and honest treatment of people who work at Capel Inc." That is the philosophy that he carried over to Montgomery Technical Institute.*

*The same year MTI was chartered, 1971, Capel Inc. a rug manufacturer, importer and exporter located in Troy, was celebrating its 50th anniversary. Jesse and his brothers, A. Leon Jr. and Arron, were continuing the successful business created by their father. This year, 2017, marks the first century for Capel Rugs, now in the hands of the next generation of Capels. Jesse still serves as Executive Director. He has always been an astute businessman and an advocate for education and comfortable in both worlds.*

*He is a former a Director of First Bancorp and Director of First Bank for over 40 years. He has been involved in numerous charitable and community building endeavors.*

# Gelynda Capel

## Trustee

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The spot this week was reserved for Gelynda Capel, Montgomery Community College Board of Trustees member since 1985 (that's 32 years of service folks) and board chair from 1994-2014. However, in true Gelynda fashion and per her request, this spot will be taken over by some of the many students whose lives were changed by the college. "I care so much for this school," Gelynda said. "MCC has had the most impact on the lives of students and the community. Hardly a family in the county hasn't been touched by MCC."

Over the past 50 years, over 6,700 degrees, diplomas and certificates have been awarded to Montgomery Community College students. Over 2,500 GEDs® and adult high school equivalencies have been awarded. Countless numbers of individuals learned how to read and write in English, trained for and got jobs, became business owners, or took classes for the love of learning. Time and again students relate their stories about how their lives were transformed by coming to MCC.

The stories include moms like Charlene Pratt, who had been out of school for 25 years when she came to MCC for her GED®. She described the experience as scary, and "a leap of faith." But she was so encouraged after accomplishing her first goal of a GED®, she went on to earn her associate degree in criminal justice. "I wanted to be an example for my daughter," Charlene said. "My teachers gave me the push I needed, and helped me to feel more confident. The transition to a degree program was easy because the staff helped me in so many ways."

Then there are stories from many individuals who were laid off as a result of textile mills closing.

Betty Gardner dreamed of going to college but couldn't afford it. Instead, she married, had a family, and went to work in a textile mill. Ten years later the mill closed, and the opportunity came for her to make her dream a reality.

"MCC gave me a new start in life. I was just a little country girl straight off the farm. I was thankful that MCC was not like a big university. I was an older student going to school with younger kids; I didn't know what the college experience was. Everyone at MCC was willing to help," Betty said. Betty graduated from the medical assisting program as a certified medical assistant (AAMA) and went straight to work for Mid-Carolina Family Medicine where she is still employed to this day.

David Rushing's job was another casualty of a mill closure. After 25 years of working in textiles he was laid off. "I was in shock," he said. David didn't think he needed college the first time around because he had a good job. Now, when given the choice between another job or an education, he chose education. "College is very essential, especially in this day and time. You have to have a college education if you want to get hired and make a decent living," David said. He enrolled in the electrical systems technology program and during his final year of school he turned down two offers for full-time employment so he could finish his degree. He was hired immediately after graduation. David said MCC "opened up new doors and new opportunities" for him.

Over the years the college has been the second home to students who came from places as far away as Japan, China, Alaska, South Africa and the Island of Trinidad. Aqui Bachan waited over two years and traveled over 2,000 miles to take gunsmithing at Montgomery Community College. As a result of his training, Aqui went on to become the fifth licensed gunsmith in his home country, the Island of Trinidad.

Yi Yu (Aidan) and Mei Juan (Amy) Yan left Shanghai to get a better education in the United States. Amy and her son Aidan lived and worked in Charlotte but enrolled in MCC's practical nursing program because it was offered mostly online, meaning they could work and go to school at the same time. Two months before Aidan graduated, he became a U.S. citizen. Both mother and son came a long way from Shanghai to realize their educational goals, but they were able to accomplish them at MCC.

While online classes helped ease the burden of traveling from Charlotte for the Yans, it saved Jeremy Hall a 7,645 mile commute from Shekou, China. Jeremy lived with his grandmother in Asheboro while attending MCC. His parents served as missionaries in China and got him a job teaching English as a Second Language there. Jeremy wanted to finish his Associate in Arts degree but didn't want to pass up the job, so he completed his degree online. "I was blessed to get my associate degree at MCC while in Shekou. I am a proud graduate of MCC and I will be representing my school in my new home," Jeremy said.

Others who made the U.S. their new home, like Celestino Cristobal, got help from their MCC ESL instructors. Celestino worked and studied for eight years before finally taking the citizenship exam. With the encouragement of his instructors, he scheduled the exam and passed. "I am thankful for the college that is available to the public. It is a place where everyone can learn and progress," Cristobal said.

MCC defied the odds, weathered bad budget years, and proved the naysayers to be wrong, largely because of the successes of its students. MCC staff and faculty worked through and survived the hardships, but students faced the real obstacles and showed others where a community college education could take them.

For example, April Williams was a high school dropout who went back to school to get her GED, then earned her Associate in Arts degree from MCC, graduating summa cum laude. She transferred to Campbell University to again graduate summa cum laude with a B.A. in government. This earned her a full scholarship to Campbell University School of Law, where she graduated in the top 10 in her class. She passed the N.C. Bar and is now a practicing attorney. April said she was "absolutely prepared" to go on to the university from MCC. "If you're willing to put in the effort, if you're doing your part, your professors are more than willing to go the extra mile for you," April

said. April Williams is an example of just how far a community college degree can take you.

While some people might not know April Williams, they do know Montgomery County sheriffs, deputies and law enforcement officers; foresters, gunsmiths, potters and taxidermists; practical nurses and nurse aides; medical assistants and mechanics; technicians and business men and women who trained at some time in their careers at Montgomery Community College. There are entire organizations that have, at some point, had only MCC graduates working there. For example, the entire staff of 12 teachers at Candor Head Start earned their Associate in Applied Science Degree in early childhood education from MCC. At one time, the entire second shift nursing staff at Autumn Care in Biscoe consisted of MCC graduates. Dr. Pete McKay D.D.S. in Seven Lakes, and Dr. Mark Lassiter D.D.S. in Norwood have only MCC dental assisting graduates on staff. Dr. Lassiter went so far as to state, "I totally attribute my practice's growth to MCC dental assistants."

MCC has not only impacted the lives of adults going back to school, it has been the setting for some phenomenal achievements by local high school students. For instance, East Montgomery High School student Keerthi Nandipati earned dual Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees from Montgomery Community College a week before she graduated from high school. "MCC was a really pleasant place to be, like a second home. I enjoyed the people and the atmosphere," she said. While Keerthi is the exceptional example, there are many others, like Mary Hassell and Hunter Nelson, who earned enough college credits in high school that they could complete an Associate in Arts degree from MCC in a single year. "Graduating with an associate degree at age 18 is pretty gratifying," Hunter said, "and it was free."

There are many more dramatic, more compelling stories, but the bottom line is that students were able to reach their goals by attending Montgomery Community College. Here is a compilation that summarizes what students have said about MCC:

"You really get the tools and experience you need to succeed."

"Once you come to MCC, you'll feel the environment, you'll feel the difference, and you'll see the difference with your own eyes."

"The teachers are awesome. They help you. They go that extra mile and sometimes you need that."

"I would highly recommend Montgomery Community College, for the respect we receive as a student. We're not just a number but a person."

"Montgomery Community College cares. It's a family. They know what's needed, and they don't mind making sure you have what you need."

"You can't compare MCC to other colleges. You have more one-on-one with the instructor. The instructors have so much experience."

"I graduated MCC on May 8, I went to work on that next Monday, on the 13th."

"I love the hands on experience you get in this program."

"You get a comfort level to where you've pretty much been trained to do everything you're going to be faced with on the job."

"It's just a small community place and it's just been an awesome experience. The classmates, the camaraderie we have together, the teachers, they're excellent, and it's just been an overall wonderful experience."

"MCC is a wonderful place to learn. It feels like home. It's close and the instructors are always willing to help make you feel like you're doing the best you can and they want to give you the best they can."

It is for these and all the rest that Gelynda Capel has established scholarships; advocated with state officials; diligently worked to create an open, accountable, diverse board; and attended every MCC graduation for the past 32 years.

At the end of each board meeting she chaired, Gelynda reminded everyone of the next graduation date. She called it the board's "payday" – the day the trustees got to reap the benefits of the college they served. That tradition is now being carried on by the current board chair, Claudia Bulthuis. Claudia's father was Colonel Joseph Reese Blair, whose generosity literally laid the foundation for the college. It is the story of the Blair family that will appear next week when the college celebrates its 50th anniversary on Sept. 7, 2017.



# Andres Hernandez

## Trustee

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Twenty-five year-old Andres Hernandez began serving on Montgomery Community College's Board of Trustees in June 2000, one month following his graduation from MCC's Criminal Justice program. He was the youngest trustee ever to serve on the board. He was also the first board member of Latino descent, representing the growing population of Latinos in Montgomery County.

After high school, Andres joined the Marine Corps Reserve. When he completed his training in August 1998, he enrolled in the Criminal Justice program at MCC. At that time he was working at Southern Correctional Institute (SCI) as a corrections officer and had always been interested in law enforcement. While at MCC he served in leadership roles as a student ambassador and a student government representative. Andres was a standout among his peers and caught the attention of college administrators and board members.

"I was approached by (board chair) Gelynda Capel to sit on the board. I thought it would be a good opportunity and I accepted," said Andres.

Gelynda said that her goal in searching for board members was to make sure all parts and populations of the county were represented and went to great lengths to achieve diversity among board membership.

During his tenure on the board, Andres continued working at SCI while he earned his bachelor's degree in human services at Gardner Webb University. Also during his tenure as youngest trustee, he served alongside Louise Dorsett, the oldest trustee.

"I saw Mrs. Dorsett like a grandmother. I remember I was at one end of the spectrum and she was at the complete other end. When she spoke, she got everyone's attention. She provided a lot of wisdom," Andres said.

Because he was the youngest, he says he spent a lot of time observing the other Board members and learning from them and their leadership characteristics.

"At that point, I was a sprout," Andres said. "Mr. James, Mr. Connelly and Mr. Blake, I watched how they carried themselves, their interest in the community, how they always seemed to have a serious investment in how the college could help the community to be more successful and help them achieve," he said.

"Sometimes Mr. Connelly would pull me aside. He was very knowledgeable and helpful and he provided me with a kind of vision for the college and the community," Andres said. He took what he learned out into the Latino community to try to encourage the younger generation and their parents to take advantage of Montgomery Community College.

"I would speak to the kids. They'd always ask how they could do it and I would promote MCC. I'd tell them to think beyond high school. Graduating high school is a major accomplishment but make it a stepping stone and go to MCC. Use the college as a springboard to go to the university. That's what I learned from the board members," Andres said.

After Andres completed his bachelor's degree in 2002, he applied with the Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE), a branch under the State Bureau of Investigation. He was forced to put his goals on hold as he was deployed that fall to Iraq. During his eight-month deployment, his "MCC family" supported Andres and his division with letters and care packages. So when he returned home in 2003, Andres visited MCC to thank everyone personally.

While there, staff members told him there was a position open for an English as a Second Language director and suggested he apply. Andres put his law enforcement dreams on hold and took the job, stepping down from his position as a trustee. Andres filled the role of ESL director until 2009 and never forgot what he learned as a member of the board.

"Parents would bring their kids to the ESL classes and I would tell them to take advantage of this jewel (MCC)," Andres said. "Being in a role as an instructor I met a lot of families and still to this day a lot of parents will see me and ask when I'm going back to teach. Their kids are now going to MCC. It's good to see some of the younger generation taking advantage of higher education opportunities," he said.

Andres was deployed to Iraq a second time in 2005-2006. He stayed with MCC until 2009, when he finally accepted a job with the SBI, doing what he always wanted to do.

"I am still grateful for the opportunity MCC gave me. I hated to leave the people there. When I worked at MCC, people in the community came to me for help in everything – questions about school, life, navigating anything. I became a leader in the Latino community. I was always a face for the college," Andres said.

Andres is now keeping a lower profile as the requirements of his job demand. He will soon be reaching the 20-year mark in the Marine Reserves and is considering retirement from that job.

# Frank Kersey

## Trustee

Frank Clifford Kersey was the third chairman of the MCC Board of Trustees and served from 1989-1992. He had been appointed to the MCC board by the Montgomery County Board of Education in January 1981. Dr. Benny B. Hampton was president of the college when Kersey became chairman after J.F. Allen resigned. During his tenure, a new building was constructed on campus for the pottery program. Mr. Kersey, vice-president of manufacturing at Clayson Knitting Co. in Star, had also served as mayor of Star for 20 years and was active in numerous civic and professional organizations. Mr. Kersey died in 2011 at the age of 75.



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we extend the heartiest congratulations  
on 50 years of success!*

*Jesse Capel was the first chairman of the first Board of Trustees when the college was chartered in 1967 and served for 16 years. The first board hired the first president and department heads, decided on what the college would teach at the beginning, and found space for the classes.*

*The first eight-member board was appointed in 1967 by the Board of Education and the County Commissioners and in 1971, the governor made appointments. The first trustees in were Jesse Capel, Eddie B. Coleman, Robert L. Liles, Hubert Moss, John Kern, Frederick L. Taylor, Harold A. Scott, and J.C. McRae. J.F. Allen replaced an outgoing trustee in 1969. In 1971, Robert B. Jordan III replaced an outgoing trustee. Edgar A. Anderson, Eleanor Chappell, Ann Kirk and Charles Bruton were added by the Governor to make a 12-member board in 1971.*

*"We have been so fortunate to have these people in our county who were committed to the mission of a community college," Mr. Capel said. "They understood how important it was to keep the community well informed and to explain to them what the college could do for them."*

*"Of course not everybody was happy all the time, but students and teachers knew that they had clear access to the board, so when we had a grievance, we took it seriously and it was mediated to everyone's satisfaction."*

*The first women trustees were Eleanor Chappell from Candor who served from 1971-1973 and Ann Kirk from Mt. Gilead, who served from 1971-1974. Three trustees who made significant differences to the college were: Educator and community leader, Eddie Brice Coleman; Louise Nash Dorsett who was the oldest, and some say wisest, trustee in the community college system and Andres Hernandez, who was the youngest trustee, but showed remarkable insight.*



# Nudy James Trustee

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Lenue Tyson James was the fourth chairman of the MCC Board of Trustees and served from 1992-1994. He had been appointed to the MCC board by the Montgomery County Commissioners in July 1983 and continued to serve on the board until 2007. He served as chairman during the transition after the resignation of President Benny Hampton in May 1992 until March 1993 when the trustee hired Dr. Ted Gasper. The trustees had appointed Bruce Turner as interim president during that time.

Mr. James was an avid supporter of the college. As editor and publisher of Montgomery Herald, he had a story about the college and its personnel almost every week. Mr. James came to Montgomery County in 1957 and was active in civic and professional organizations until he retired in 1988.

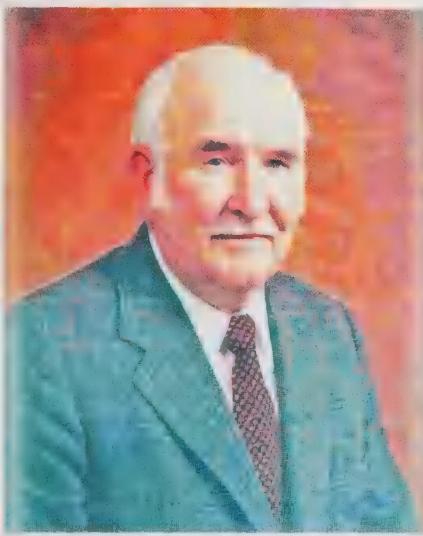
He was a founding member and director of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, on the Building Committee of Montgomery County Public Library and served as president of the N.C. Press Association. James received the MCC "Humanitarian of the Year" award in 2008 and the Montgomery County Fund's Humanitarian Award in 2011.

March 4, 2008, was proclaimed "Lenue T. James Day" by Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. Mr. James died in 2015 at the age of 91.

Mr. James was succeeded by Gelynda Capel, who is still a trustee, but gave up the chairmanship in 2015 and was succeeded by Claudia Blair Bulthuis.

# J.F. Allen

## Trustee



J.F. Allen was the second chairman of the MCC Board of Trustees from 1983, when Jesse Capel resigned after 16 years as the first chairman, until he resigned in 1989. He had been a member of the first board of trustees since he was appointed by the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners in March 1969. Now age 90, he and Jesse Capel are the only two living members of the original board that established the college and built it from the ground up. Mr. Allen's memory of those early years is remarkable. A community college for Montgomery County was dear to his heart and was one of his campaign promises to the county when he ran for the N.C. Senate in 1966. MCC, which started as Montgomery Technical Institute, was chartered in 1967 by the N.C. Board of Education. Mr. Allen introduced a bill for a technical institute in Montgomery County, one of eight bills for community colleges introduced that year. The state appropriated funds for the other seven, but not for Montgomery. That took some political maneuvering. Mr. Allen recalls that Gov. Dan Moore was supporting an insurance bill and Allen had it tied up. He had made many friends in the Senate. "The governor invited me to breakfast at his house. He said he needed my help on the insurance bill. I told him that I had promised the folks in Montgomery County a community college. If I got the college, he would get his insurance bill. Then I thanked him for the breakfast and left. Later that day, two of the governor's aides came to see me and told me Montgomery would get a college. I told them the governor would get his insurance bill passed." Mr. Allen said that was the same year East Carolina College came up for university status. "I have always supported education and cast the deciding vote to make it East Carolina University," he recalled. "I was on the Senate Education Committee studying public schools and saw the need for learning a skill after high school. We had a lot of kids dropping out to go to work in textile mills and they needed more skills to succeed at the mills. One of the first classes we set up was to train (textile mill) fixers." Mr. Allen said a community college was essential for

Montgomery County citizens to learn a trade and learn how to do things. "We needed to teach people to use their hands and their heads, to become thinkers. By that I mean think of all the details involved in what you are doing - how to do it better and how to get to the results you want," he said. Post high school education had to be accessible to people. "We were even more isolated back then. Highway N.C. 134 didn't exist and U.S. 220 was a two-lane highway. Not that many high school graduates went to college - people couldn't afford it - and we needed a way to put money in the hands of working people," Mr. Allen said. Mr. Allen had accomplished his main goal in the N.C. Senate and when the governor offered him the Commissioner of Highways position, he did not run for a second term. Roads were also high on his list of priorities.

That also made it possible to be appointed to the MTI Board of Trustees. "We didn't have a guidebook to go by. We had to use our best judgement to decide which classes would best serve the citizens of the county, hired the best teachers we could get and hired the first president," Allen said. David H. Bland was the first president from 1967-1971. He was an organizer who knew the importance of community support to get a college established. The second president, Marvin Miles led the college through construction of its first real home in a building on land donated by Dr. Reece Blair and the Blair family and the successful passage of a bond referendum to finance construction. Mr. Miles and his staff boldly added specialty programs and extended the ability of students to get bachelor's degrees through a partnership with Gardner-Webb College.

Dr. Benny Hampton became the third president when Mr. Miles retired in 1984 and worked until 1992. His tenure was a time of transition with changes mandated by the N.C. Department of Community Colleges and the rapidly increasing availability and use of computers. MCC set up its first computer classroom and started offering classes.

"It was like it each president was sent at the right time," Mr. Allen said. "Each one had the leadership and the skills we needed at the time. We went from a technical institute to a technical college to a community college. Every year, enrollment grew and the college and MCC's reputation grew." Mr. Allen recalled that Shirley Jenkins was did a fantastic job setting up the nursing program and Mike Ferree had taken the pottery program to the national level. Gunsmithing was risky and took some more political maneuvering by staff members to get it approved, but it soon became nationally known and had a waiting list of students. In 1989, the college was in good shape and Mr. Allen had more immediate projects to attend to, so he resigned from the board. "I figured 20 years of my life was enough, especially the last eight years as trustee chairman. That was almost a full time job," he said. He devoted his time then to two major projects. First, organizing the Save the Old School Committee to set up a non-profit organization to preserve Biscoe High School, the oldest state-supported public high school in North Carolina, for a library and community center. And, he was hired as President of Montgomery Memorial Hospital with the purpose of getting the hospital solvent financially. Mr. Allen's dedication to education came from his own life experiences. When he graduated from Star High School, he had earned a full scholarship from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to any state-supported college in North or South Carolina, but his family situation was such that he had to decline it. "We were poor. We couldn't even afford a suitcase," he said. "My mother had been sick a long time and my daddy took sick and couldn't work on the farm for two years. During that whole time, Dr. Griffin treated both my parents until they got their health back. Daddy didn't have the money to pay the doctor, so daddy gave him our 300-acre farm."

Mr. Allen's father, Barna Allen, then took out a mortgage to buy a 40-acre farm. "I told my daddy that I would stay and work the farm with him and that is what I did," Mr. Allen said. When he was 17 and big for his age, his daddy signed for him to join the U.S. Navy, but served less than a year because World War II ended and recent recruits were given the opportunity to be discharged. Mr. Allen took that option, came home and told his daddy he would help him on the farm until he figured out what he wanted to do. Later, he went into the construction business and became a very successful contractor. Barna Allen was the most generous man that J.F. had ever known, and that generous spirit and caring for his fellow man influenced his son's decisions in everything he did. My daddy was a loving but firm man. He instilled in us his philosophy: "Do what you ought to do." Mr. Allen said he always "tried my best to look out for people who were in the same boat I was in growing up - being poor." As Highway Commissioner was instrumental in getting a bridge over the Pee Dee River on N.C. 731 to save farmers miles of travel to get to the markets in Norwood. The J.F. Allen Bridge is the only dedicated bridge on N.C. 731. Through the N.C. Community Fund, the J.F. and Jean Allen Family Endowment supports charitable, educational, religious and scientific purposes. The J.F. and Jean Maness Allen Divinity Scholarship is awarded annually to a student or student at the Campbell University Divinity School. In 2003, Mr. Allen was received the Humanitarian Award for "many years of generous service to Montgomery County from the Montgomery Fund. In his acceptance remarks, Mr. Allen said, "Do something more than to breathe up the good air around you. If there is anything you can do to help your community, do it."

# Eddie Brice Coleman

## Trustee

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Eddie Coleman was one of the first trustees at the newly chartered Montgomery Technical Institute in September 1967.

“Everybody was glad he accepted,” said Jesse Capel, the first chairman of the Board of Trustees.

“He was well loved by the entire community and fully committed to the mission of the community college and what it could accomplish. He worked hard at being a trustee and studied what was going on all the time.”

That first board hired the first president, Dr. David Bland, and the first administrative staff, including Bruce Turner and Phil Kissell, both of whom would work at the college for over 30 years. Mr. Coleman served 12 years as a trustee, but he and Bruce and Phil remained friends until his death at age 97 in 2015.

Bruce called him “an honorable man, one of the most remarkable persons to ever live in Montgomery County. Phil called him “one more fine gentleman who truly cared about people.”

Mr. Coleman and his wife, Maudestine, came to Troy in 1947 to teach at Peabody Academy, one of the oldest secondary schools for minority students in North Carolina. He was a major figure in the relatively smooth transition to integrated schools in Montgomery County. He was often called “the voice of reason,” and continued his teaching career at West Montgomery High School.

In 1972, Mr. Coleman became Director of Adult Basic Education at Sandhills Community College, where he received the Sibley Professor Award for excellence in teaching and supervision. He taught, motivated and inspired youth and adults for over 35 years. As an educator, he understood the circumstances of students of all ages and from all walks of life. He knew because of his own life experiences. He reached out to help others because he had been helped.

He was the son of share-croppers in Gaffney, SC, and attended a one-room school with no lights, no water, no inside toilet and a potbellied stove for heat. Education ended after 7th grade. The farm owner saw Eddie’s potential and arranged for him to go to high school in Gaffney where he graduated as valedictorian and had the highest grade point average in the history of the school. He was the first person from his community ever to go to high school.

After he graduated from Friendship Junior College, he took a defense job with the military and was drafted in 1942. He served until 1946 and saw combat in France, Germany and Austria. He received many commendations and the Bronze Star and combat buttons. He and Maudestine had married before he went overseas and, in 1946, both enrolled at N.C. A&T State College (now University) where he earned his master’s degree in Agricultural Education and School Administration.

They raised their two sons, Eddie Jr. and Ronald, in Troy and lived out their lives there. Students and co-workers never forgot what a gentle, kindly man Mr. Coleman was and how much his encouragement meant to them.

“The good thing about being a teacher is seeing your students surpass you. I have an appreciation for seeing young people grow and do well,” Mr. Coleman said in a 2014 interview.

That appreciation for watching people learn and grow is what made Mr. Coleman a valuable trustee at MTI, said Jesse Capel. He kept his community well informed and explained to them what a technical college was all about, encouraging many who came to take classes.

“We all knew there was a generation of adults who had the ability, but never had the chance that I did to go to school,” Mr. Coleman had said.

Mr. Coleman’s tenure on the board was a busy time as the new college grew with new programs and more students every year. He worked for the passage of the bond that made MTI’s first building on its own campus possible.

Eddie and Maudestine Coleman retired from teaching in 1982, but remained active in their church and in civic, social, cultural, political and economic organizations for many years. Mr. Coleman never stopped being an advocate for education, encouraging people to go to MCC and keep on learning.

# Louise Nash Dorsett

## Trustee

Louise Dorsett had a remarkable tenure on the Montgomery Community College Board of Trustees. When she retired in 2009 at the age of 96, she was the one of the oldest persons to have served on a community college board. She was appointed by the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners in 1989 and reappointed every term for 20 years. For 12 years, she was secretary to the MCC board. Until she was physically unable to attend the meetings just two years before her death at age 98 in 2011, she was an active committee chair and came to the meetings fully prepared and ready for questions on her reports and recommendations. MCC was dear to her heart for the opportunities it presented to the citizens. She knew the value of an education and the rewards of being a lifelong learner.

"Louise had a passion for education," said Gelynda Capel, MCC trustee and close friend of Mrs. Dorsett. "She was so devoted to MCC. We loved her spunk. She would come in with a twinkle in her eye and ask the questions that needed to be asked. She was an expert in bringing unity and cohesiveness to the board."

Mrs. Dorsett was born in Boulder, Colorado. When she was a teenager, her father became Superintendent of Tillery Hydroelectric Plant and the family moved to Mt. Gilead. She graduated from UNC Woman's College, now UNC Greensboro, in 1934 and taught high school English and worked at Carolina Power & Light Co. In 1943, she enlisted in the US Navy and was in the second class of WAVES trained at Mt. Holyoke, Mass., the first from North Carolina. She attained the rank of Lieutenant before her enlistment was up in 1945. During that time, she had married Lewis Dorsett, her classmate at Mt. Gilead High School. They came home to Mt. Gilead where they raised a family and were dedicated civic-minded citizens, active in their church and numerous professional and charitable organizations. Mrs. Dorsett personally knew several generations of Montgomery countians. Rarely did a student come through MCC that she didn't know someone in their family. After World War II, she and her father owned a business in Mt. Gilead that served farmers. She was a social worker with the Montgomery County Department of Social Services from 1958 to 1967 and then taught Social Studies at West Montgomery High School until her retirement in 1978. Former students and co-workers stayed in touch, seeking her wisdom and listening to her opinions, which she never held back. She was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine in 2003. When Mrs. Dorsett was seated on the MCC Board in 1989, Dr. Benny Hampton was president, Frank Kersey was chairman of the Board of Trustees and MCC's signature programs - Pottery, Gunsmithing, Taxidermy and Forestry - were getting well established.

The 1990s were a decade of change. Bruce Turner served as interim president between Dr. Hampton and Dr. Ted Gasper, Nudy James led the board from 1992-1994 when Gelynda Capel was elected chair and guided the trustees for 21 years. When Dr. Gasper resigned, Bruce Turner was appointed to a second interim presidency for a year until the trustees hired Dr. Mary Kirk who served for 16 years.

Meanwhile, new programs were added, online classes and weekend classes were added. Weekend workshops and seminars were frequent. No one was more proud of the college MCC had become and what it meant to Montgomery County than Louise Dorsett.



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# Bruce Turner

## Staff

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**BRUCE T. TURNER**  
... Coordinator

Bruce Turner's name comes high on the list of those who made Montgomery Community College the success it is today by employees, students and supporters who were there in the early days.

The early days began two years before Montgomery Technical Institute was chartered by the N.C. Board of Education in 1971.

When he actually retired in 2002 after 34 years, hardly a family in Montgomery County didn't know Bruce, through a continuing education class, as advisors on classes he was developing, in his two stints as interim president (1992-93 and 1998-99), his amazing fund raising as interim Foundation director or just meeting him around the county at hundreds of impromptu back porch pickings and planned events.

"We went from everything to goat ropings to chitlin struts," Bruce said. "When you work for the people, you have to get to know them. Then they will tell you what they want."

Bruce was recruited in 1968 by the N.C. Department of Education to come to a new technical institute being established in Montgomery County. He was known to the Dept. of Education for his work with McGraw-Hill Education's ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Exam), a program being field tested by McGraw Hill to standardize their curricula and testing. He was also a GED test administrator.

"A group of forward thinking Montgomery County leaders had campaigned the state legislature for several years because they knew the citizens would benefit from educational opportunities," Bruce said. "They had appointed a board of trustees and hired the first president, David Bland, who had also been involved in the ABLE testing program."

Bruce's experience came from five years at Central Prison in Raleigh where he had been recruited by Robert Hyde, education director for the N.C. Department of Corrections, who was establishing the first educational system for adult inmates in the prison system. The concept was intriguing and Bruce accepted the challenge.

"I actually did my practice teaching at Central," Bruce said.

At Central Prison, he learned that to give people what they needed, they had to recognize the need, then they would build the mechanisms themselves. He wrote the grant for the library. The students set up the classroom.

Men who were serving one or more life sentences were intelligent, curious and eager to learn.

"They were not there for lack of intelligence," he said.

During the bloodiest riot in North Carolina prison history in April 1968, nothing was touched in the school or the library. The inmates protected it because it was their school and their library. Bruce was not threatened because he was their friend and they respected him.

But Bruce was about to exit the prison system into the community college system in adult education. He had been recruited by the Department of Community Colleges with an offer from a fledgling technical institute in Troy.

When he came for the interview, President Bland showed them around the county and Bruce liked it. His wife, Ellen, had reservations about giving up good jobs and leaving Raleigh.

"What attracted me to Montgomery County that day were the people I met. They were basically good, honorable, hardworking people. I also saw such remarkable talent, which obviously brings all the potential in the world to an educator," Bruce said.

Montgomery Technical Institute was the result of a political deal between the governor and a Montgomery County legislator. Which one? No one is sure anymore because several have been credited with making the deal," Bruce said. "The attitude at the state level was that it wouldn't last more than a couple of years anyway."

What no one anticipated was that the staff the trustees and David Bland put together was a group of determined, hard working men and women who would dedicate their lives to building a school that they believed in and would sacrifice their time and personal lives to make it work.

"We saw the value of the school to the county, but we had to convince the citizens that they did have skills and they were capable of making their lives better," Bruce said. "We joked later that we were just too young and stupid not to know we couldn't do it, so we forged ahead. Decatur Jones, vocational director, and his wife, Virginia, bookkeeper, were the most mature employees in the building."

### The early years

MTI was housed in what is not the Board of Education offices in Troy.

A vacant automobile dealership, which was dubbed the annex, was somewhat renovated for vocational courses. The roof leaked,

but they put boards on the floor to walk on and buckets to catch the rain and forged ahead.

E.C. Warner taught electrical maintenance. Bob Roberts taught industrial maintenance. Shirley Jenkins started with nothing and built one of the best LPN (Licensed Practical Nursing) programs in the state.

Zedith Teague later started the first production pottery program in the state. When she left, Mike Ferree took it to international attention.

Ellen Turner taught secretarial science and Charles Kendall taught business administration. Lynnie Comer taught accounting.

Rupert "Chuck" Marsh was the Director of Extension and Bruce was in charge of adult education and the Learning Resource Center until Phil Kissell was hired. Marsh initiated and administered MDTA - Manpower Development Training Act, with classes in welding, upholstery knitting machine fixer and a dozen other skilled trades. MTI had training classes for almost every industry in the county.

Fire departments did their training at MTI.

MTI became one of the most vocational oriented schools in the system

The early childhood education was started and a day care lab was set up in a rented house on West Main Street in Troy. Little Friends of Troy has continued there since the college program was moved when the new campus was built.

Shirley Lowery from Star was hired as the president's secretary and his wife, Betty Lowdermilk Bland, handled financial aid. Betty Bland was a native of Mt. Gilead.

Eugene Mercer was the first director of student personnel.

Each class started with a few students, but enrollment grew every year.

#### **Supporters gave MTI needed boosts.**

The biggest boost for the college came from Troy native Col. Reese Blair (US Army Ret.) when he offered to give the college 147.9 acres of land on behalf of the Blair family.

"Col. Blair was a brilliant scientist, an unassuming man. His daughter, Claudia Blair Bulthuis is the current chairman of the Board of Trustees and carries on the family tradition of service to others and generosity," Bruce said.

Two men who were influential in getting the school established, Bruce said, were Eddie Coleman and Howard Dorsett.

"Mr. Coleman was a teacher and an advocate of education, especially for the African-American population. Mr. Dorsett was chairman of the Board of Education," Bruce said.

"The men and women in Montgomery County came to believe in Montgomery Technical Institute," Bruce said. "In the community college system, the student is your boss. They are the taxpayers and if they don't see value in what you do, it won't happen. You have to move among the people. They are the power base."

#### **Bruce moved among the people**

It didn't take him long to know which country stores had a whittling bench and make friends of them all.

He knew where the knife-swaps were and joined in, went to quilting bees and knitting groups, knew who made split oak baskets and who wove pine needle baskets.

Pretty soon, small classes of quilters, basket makers and needlecrafters were in every nook and cranny in Montgomery County. He worked from 8 a.m.-10 p.m., visiting the evening classes wherever they were.

"Montgomery County has always been rich in folk art, just full of creative, artistic people. They just didn't know they were creative and artistic."

Ted Blake, former vice-president, said Bruce would hold a class under a shade tree.

"He took me to a class out in Windblow that I swear was in a tobacco barn."

"Yep. Sure was," Bruce said. "If you have just a couple of people interested in learning how to do something, you have to find a place near them where they are comfortable. They will build the class from there." The shade tree class is true, too.

"Charlie Singleton had learned how to split white oak and make baskets from his mother who learned it from her mother and on back," Bruce said. "He had the oak wood in his backyard, everybody knew him, so we met





there and he taught them to cut the oak splits and weave the baskets."

From neighborhood classes to adult high school education diplomas, people became more comfortable to come to the campus to take vocational courses. Building support from the grassroots gave the people a sense of ownership in their technical institute.

When the Blair family donated the land, MTI had to get a bond issue passed to put a building on it. In the middle of an economic downturn, every MTI employee took on the responsibility of gathering support for the school. Against all odds, the bond issue, authorizing the construction of a new campus, passed.

In a new building with actual classrooms and shop areas for vocational courses, MTI hit a new growth spurt. Almost all the courses offered at MCC began in a continuing education class.

"At one time, we trained one of every 17 EMTs (Emergency Medical Technician) in the state," Bruce said. "We were also the North Carolina Center for heat pump skills training."

Bruce and Ellen Bradley had met when they were students at Atlantic Christian College, where she graduated with a bachelor of science degree in business education. She taught at MTI for two years until the first child was born, then worked behind the scenes with Bruce as he initiated new classes and worked 10-12 hours a day.

Bruce's undergraduate degrees from Atlantic Christian were in English and History.

In Raleigh, he was about halfway through his master's degree in Higher Education Administration at N.C. State University and completed it when Appalachian State University offered a field-based program in Troy.

He summed up his life at MCC as long hours, a lot of hard work and a lot of fun.

# Party like an educator

MTI's first Christmas party was hosted by Bruce and Ellen Turner in 1968. They had moved from Raleigh and rented a house near Mt. Gilead that summer, but it was Christmas and time for a celebration.

MTI was just getting started with a handful of employees, a few programs in place and students had just started classes that year.

Bruce and Ellen bought the food and did the cooking for the 10 students and staff who attended. MTI had no extra funds for anything, Bruce said. "There were not many of us, but we had a good time."

By Christmas 1969, MTI had grown and so did the party.

Ellen recalled that it all came together with the help of several other employees with just the right talents and connections.

Bob Bell, a business administration instructor, had a culinary background and helped them prepare the food.

Chancy Roberts, a good cook who worked in the office, made them a four-person kitchen crew.

Bruce and Ellen had bought the food.

Chancy's husband, Bob Roberts, taught industrial maintenance and mentioned that his brother had a band that he thought would come and play.

The band was The Castaways, who went on to be named to the Carolina Beach Music Awards Hall Of Fame.

Montgomery Country Club offered the ballroom for the party and a good time was had by all.



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# Ellen Turner

## Staff

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When Bruce and Ellen Turner decided to make the drastic lifestyle change to move from Raleigh to Troy, Ellen knew she could find a job, but did not expect it to be at Montgomery Technical Institute where her husband, Bruce, had been recruited to head the Learning Resource Center.

Ellen had been raised and went to college in Wilson and then worked in Raleigh. This would be her first experience living in a rural area.

"It took a while for me to orient myself to living here, but the people were so welcoming, so genuine and so nice, it soon became home," Ellen said recently. "I can't imagine living anywhere else."

In 1968, when they moved to Montgomery County, Ellen had five years experience as administrative secretary to the N.C. Commissioner of Mental Health. She had a bachelor of science degree in business education with a minor in history from Atlantic Christian College, now Barton College, and teaching credentials.

MTI administrators took a look at her resume and offered her a teaching job.

"I didn't expect to work at MTI, but I loved it and liked working the same place and sort of the same hours as Bruce," she said.

Ellen remembers her first class of four students.

Lucille Brandenburg was in her 50s, but wanted to learn office skills.

"I don't recall that she ever took a full time job," Ellen said.

Mary Alsobrook, who was a super fast typist, and Betty Hawkins, both got office jobs in the county.

Ellen became good friends with Cherry Caudill, who went to work for the Department of Social Services and continued her education.

When Caudill's husband, who was with the state highway patrol, was transferred to Waynesboro, they kept in touch. When Caudill retired, she was a department head at Haywood County DSS.

Ellen said MTI got a request from a group of women who wanted to learn speedwriting, which was replacing Gregg Shorthand in offices.

"I didn't know speedwriting, but I looked at the material, knew I could do it, and we all learned together," she said. "Shorthand and speedwriting were later replaced by the dictaphones and now there are digital voice recorders, but the secretaries still had to transcribe the voice into the written word."

Every year, more women signed up for the secretarial science course. They were called secretaries in those days. Now they are administrative assistants, executive assistants, office clerks or other titles that describe their positions in an organization.

In the 1960s, almost all office clerical staff were female.

"Most of them worked for lower wages than the people running the machines in the mills," Ellen said. She advocated for \$7 an hour, but that didn't happen in North Carolina for decades. The national minimum wage today is \$7.25.

In addition to basic office skills, Ellen also taught business math and business law.

Ellen finished the semester a couple of weeks before their first daughter, Rebecca, was born followed in a few years by Colleen. Ellen didn't work in an office for the next 14 years, but she sold Tupperware and Stanly Home Products as an outlet for herself and she got to know many more county residents.

She took the basketweaving classes at MTI and made baskets in a variety of styles. Hers were in demand at craft shows.

She worked behind the scenes with Bruce to research and develop new programs and was hostess for many impromptu meals at her house for prospective employees from out-of-town, visiting artists, workshop leaders, guest lecturers and other interesting people Bruce ran into.

When the girls went to high school, Ellen returned to the business world.

In the classroom and in her career, Ellen was known as a graceful, gentle, creative woman, full of energy and with endless patience.

She overcame some major health issues and finally retired several years ago. She never lost her sense of humor and still stays busy. She enjoys crocheting these days and freely hands out her handmade gifts.

### Guess who's coming to dinner?

Accommodations for guests and restaurants were scarce in Montgomery County in the 1960s and 1970s. Bruce and Ellen Turner extended their hospitality for meals and overnight stays for many.

Several years prior, when the college was a dream and goal of forward thinking county leaders, officials who would make those decisions also came to Troy and were guests of Julianne and Jesse Capel in their home.



## *First secretarial science class in 1969 with instructor, Ellen Turner.*

Jesse Capel was the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees, selected when the plans for a technical institute was still on the drawing board. Like Ellen Turner, Julianne Capel was from Raleigh, and had to make the adjustment to the limited shopping choices and no accommodations for visitors to the county to stay overnight.

In a recent interview with the Capels, the conversation turned to hospitality for the elected officials, educators, candidates for president and other prospective administrative employees from other counties or states.

"Well, they stayed with us, of course," Julianne said as if it were the most natural thing in the world. The Capels were accustomed to offering hospitality to businessmen visiting Capel Rug Mill, the family business.

As Montgomery Technical Institute became more established, visiting artists, workshop leaders, guest lecturers and an occasional Department of Community Colleges official were all invited to dine with the Turners.

Sometimes they came on short notice, but Ellen is still a magician in the kitchen and Bruce is a willing helper.

"I was never surprised when Bruce would call and say he was bringing someone for lunch or dinner. I always had extra, so they ate what we ate," Ellen said. "Bruce's work days were so long, he came home for lunch and dinner to spend a little time with me and the girls because they were in bed before his day ended, sometimes as late as midnight."

When they moved to Montgomery County and Ellen was teaching business classes, her schedule was almost as long as his.

"MTI didn't have the money to hire a night staff, so we all taught day and night classes," she said. "Many nights when we finished classes at 10 p.m., Chancy and Bob Roberts would come to the house. Chancy would cook up country ham and I'd make biscuits for our supper."

Chancy worked in the office and Bob taught industrial maintenance.

Occasionally between day and night classes, someone would bring a grill and they'd all pitch in for steaks for a meal on campus.

"As Bruce likes to say, we found the fun wherever we could," Ellen said.

Now, 50 years later, hospitality to visitors has not changed. With more nearby restaurants and accommodations, guests can choose a hotel, but they are also welcomed into the homes of trustees, college administrators and instructors.

# Johnnie F. Horne

## Graduate

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Johnnie F. Horne was one of the earliest graduates of a curriculum program at Montgomery Technical Institute and one of the first African-Americans to graduate as well.

The Reverend Johnnie Horne graduated from the industrial maintenance program in 1969 along with Larry E. Patterson, who is now deceased. His graduation ceremony took place at Holder's Restaurant in Troy, where Horne's and Patterson's families gathered and a dinner was held in their honor.

Horne was one of eight children. He graduated from the Peabody School in 1968, which was the last year the school operated. When Montgomery Technical Institute moved into the board of education building on Page Street, the board of education moved to the Peabody Building. Horne said being one of the first students to take classes at the newly-established MTI was a great experience.

"It was the beginning of it all and we had the opportunity to intermingle with the staff: Mr. [Ron] Kincaid, Mr. [Bruce] Turner, would help you out in any way that you needed," Horne said. His instructor was E.C. Warner who was also the county inspector. Horne remembered Warner's having high expectations from his students.

"We went around with him on his inspections," Horne recalls. "He told us that due to the fact that he was the county inspector, if we ever did any wiring and he inspected it, he would be tougher on us than on any electrician in the county, simply because we took wiring under his instruction." Needless to say, Horne knew his wiring. "The classroom was always hands-on. We wired several buildings. We wired the addition that was done to the Page Street building. We assisted wiring the machine shop," he said.

Students in the industrial maintenance program learned machining and lathe operation. One of their projects was to create small replica cannons. "We made cannons that would actually fire. They were like the one on the T.V. show *F Troop*. Mr. [R.E.] Roberts (industrial maintenance instructor) had us make them in the machine shop. We gave them away to members of the faculty," Horne said.

Horne worked full time at Russell Hosiery in Star and later went to Alandale Knitting while attending MTI. There was never a question of not working. "I tried just going to school but after sitting around for a couple evenings with nothing to do . . . that just wasn't for me. It wasn't the way I did things," Horne said.

After Horne graduated he went to work for Troy Drapery where he was elevated to supervisor. There were jobs in industrial maintenance available, but they would have required a move.

"My father was killed at an early age and I didn't want to move at the time. I was the only son at home that could take care of my mom and I felt an obligation to stay at home," Horne said.

In 1972 Horne married his high school sweetheart, Linda Joyce Thomas. They had their first child in 1974 and in 1975, Horne was called into the ministry. Horne eventually left textiles to sell insurance – a job he kept for almost 26 years. During this time he also began pastoring. He felt that selling insurance was a lot like pastoring because he was helping people prepare themselves and their families for their future.

"I was a house-to-house salesman, which was hard, but I felt like it was a calling from the Lord because I was a people person. When my agent approached me concerning selling insurance I initially had no interest. I told him about being a Christian. We were talking about life insurance policies and I was talking about life insurance policies with the Lord. He asked me to look into it. The Lord took it from there," Horne said.

Horne began pastoring full time in 1981 and filled positions in several churches over the years. He is now pastoring for St. Stephen's United Church of God in Troy and New Covenant UCOG in Fayetteville. He has been serving as a district overseer for the Southern District United Churches of God for seven years and is chairman of the board of directors for the district. Horne retired from the insurance industry in 2001.

"I believe the college has been very constructive for the county," Horne said. "I know a lot of people who have gone to MCC. I know going there had an impact on my jobs and in my life. In the ministry we seek out young people to encourage them to get their education. It's very needful and the opportunities for education are here."

Horne and his wife Linda have one daughter and four sons. Two of them are pastoring their own churches.



# Beth Smith

## Staff

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Beth Smith, vice-president of student services, admits to being a technology geek. That means she not only expects change, she anticipates it. That is why after 31 years come December 1, Beth Smith is still smiling her unflappable smile and leading MCC through all the technology changes that are still coming. "Change doesn't bother me. I expect it. But, even with so many changes, it seems more hectic now," Beth said. "I started working here right after the technology system started. We were still using IBM selectric typewriters and student records were kept on paper. As we got computers in a few offices, we still kept

records on paper and then entered them on the computer. Technology has changed everything – the way we teach and the way the world does business. We have had to stay current to prepare our students for any job, because now every job requires some computer knowledge." Thirty-years ago, Beth was secretary to the Extended Day Program for the public schools, which was held on the MTI campus. Beth had earned associate degrees in secretarial science and business administration at MTI. "I had great teachers – Judy Miller in secretarial courses, Mary Chesson for English and Mike Lunday in business," she said. Beth continued her education while working and earned a bachelor of science degree in business administration from Gardner-Webb University and her MBA from Pfeiffer University.

Her career at MCC has included Admissions Officer and Registrar before she became vice-president of Student Services. When she accepted a job as secretary in the Student Services Department at MTI. Dr. Benny Hampton was president and the name changed to Montgomery Community College in 1987.

"I was really shy when I started working here, but I had some great and encouraging bosses – Phil Kissell, Kathy Harris and Bill Price – you couldn't stay shy around them. Phil was always laughing and joking around with students. Kathy was so full of enthusiasm about everything and her laugh was contagious," Beth said.

"A lot of people will remember Bill Price's old pickup truck. Once he got four of us in the cab of that old truck to go find a Christmas tree and take it to a family. He would take food to people and got us all to adopt a kid at Christmas. Bill loved to do those things that nobody knew about."

Bill Price was Dean of Instruction, later Dean of Vocational/Technical programs, from 1984 – 1997. "I also worked for Ken Jarvis, (Business Manager 1985-1992). I have been fortunate to work with some really good people. I love this place," Beth said. Beth has worked quietly and efficiently through the tenures of presidents Hampton, Ted Gasper, Mary Kirk, and the interim presidencies of Bruce Turner and Mary Chesson before current president, Dr. Chad Bledsoe, was hired. Beth is still admired for her work ethic, for taking on any responsibility and completing it successfully and for staying calm and composed at all times, including tense times during changes in leadership. "I don't mind being a little behind with my work. I

like a challenge," she said. "I like working in the background. I did teach one class in word processing. I love computers, but I wasn't cut out to be a teacher." One of the biggest challenges was when the whole operating system had to be changed from the quarter system to the semester system. The next really big change came in 2007 when the new computer system for the community college system came online. "For over two years, people from every college had spent several days a week away from our offices in training on the new system," Beth said. "That was almost challenge than I wanted." The hardest day at work was the day Kathy Harris retired. "I did not want her to leave," Beth said. "We had had some good times with Kathy. I remember when, I think it was the Chamber of Commerce, had

road rallies, which was like a scavenger hunt on wheels. We were given sealed directions at every checkpoint. We had the whole student services department in a van. Kathy was the driver and I was the navigator. I don't think I have ever laughed so much."

There were also sad days with no laughter, only tears. "I was here the day Mary Gaffney collapsed and died. Now that was tough," Beth said. Mary was secretary in Continuing Education and loved by everyone, students and staff alike. "Then we lost Sandra McCollum (assistant purchasing agent) whose sudden illness and death was such a shock. Losing Zane Simmons (art instructor) and Steve Hamilton (maintenance) shocked and hurt us all deeply," Beth said. Her favorite memory of Steve is not his upbeat attitude and constant jokes, but the day he rescued a hummingbird that had got inside and had its little beak stuck in a ceiling tile. "Steve gently rescued that tiny bird, then sat at a picnic table feeding it sugar water until it was strong enough to fly away," Beth recalled. Beth was Registrar when Mary Kirk became president in 1999. She convinced Beth to take the vice-president position in Student Services. "Being a vice-president requires more supervisory duties and I prefer the grunt work," Beth said. Staff members say she is an excellent supervisor and has been a mentor to them. "I think I will always be a registrar at heart. I miss getting to know all the students," Beth said. She was especially fond of the Career and College Promise (CCP) program, which she headed, because she said, "everyone else was swamped with work, but that is where I got to know all the high school students." CCP is 200-250 high school juniors and seniors taking college transfer courses. CCP will continue, along with the Early College High School, and her department will do the paperwork and registration for both. Beth said she has seen many changes in the student body over her 30 years at MCC. "We don't get a lot of international students now in this political climate and student visas are much more complicated, but I particularly remember two sisters from South Africa who were college transfer students," she said.

"We still get students from everywhere in U.S. and we like having them on campus." Beth has heard from so many local students that MCC gave them the opportunity to attend college here at home.

"Being small gives us several advantages," Beth said. "It makes us approachable, especially for students who are nervous about going to college and it gives those older students who have been out of public school a long time the courage to go to college."

A lot of high school graduates just want to get away, Beth said, but we are offering them an attractive opportunity to study here. Beth has been through SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) accreditations at MCC, a grueling year-long, self-study to insure that SACS standards are being met.

With Mary Kirk's strong encouragement, Beth once served on an accreditation team at a Texas college. She was hesitant, but now is am glad she did it because it was such a good experience. "I have been very luck to spend my career at MCC," Beth said. "There has never been a day when I dreaded going to work."

# Mary Perkins Anderson

## Staff

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Mary Perkins Anderson was one of Montgomery Technical Institute's (MTI) first public information officers (PIOs). Many remember her as a reporter for the Montgomery Herald, and later for the Courier Tribune, but her first job in Montgomery County was familiarizing citizens with MTI.

Mary grew up in Darlington, SC and earned her bachelor's degree in English from Coker College. She loved to read, and was an aspiring writer. She also earned her teaching credentials because, "that's what girls did in the mid-1960s," she said. "Following that pattern, I got married."

Her first job was in the office of an auto parts manufacturer where office workers were commodities and much of the work the women did was undervalued. After her son was born, she taught school for two years in South Carolina where the pay scale for male teachers was \$1000 more per year than for female teachers. After her daughter was born, the Perkins family moved to South Florida where they lived for 10 years. During those intervening years, Mary did some writing and volunteer work.

"But mostly I raised children," Mary said.

In 1974, after their second son was born, the family moved to Montgomery County.

"I had only been there once before and experienced culture shock. No department stores, no daily newspaper, no Publix," Mary said.

One of her near neighbors told her about a creative writing class at MTI. That's when she set out to meet people and enrolled in the writing class taught by Ruth Moose, wife of noted artist and MTI's art instructor Talmadge Moose.

"As I met people, I was most impressed by the raw talent in Montgomery County. Artists, musicians, craftspeople, story tellers – it was amazing what people were doing in their everyday lives with no idea how rare and beautiful their work was," Mary said.

While she was taking classes she heard that college administrators Ted Blake (Dean of Instruction), and Bruce Turner (Dean of Continuing Education), were looking for someone to do research part-time on prospective new programs. Mary had gotten to

know Ted and Bruce and they offered her the job. Her first assignment was to do research for a new gunsmithing program.

Before computers and the internet, research involved hours spent in the library, finding and reading trade magazines, and calling and writing various contacts for information. She went to trade shows, conducted interest surveys and passed out thousands of leaflets.

"I talked to hundreds of people and followed every lead," Mary said.

What evolved were the building blocks for a curriculum gunsmithing program, one of only a handful of such programs in the country. Mary wrote the lengthy application and documentation required for the new program by the State Board of Community Colleges, which was ultimately approved.

Her next research project was for the Taxidermy program, which was also later approved.

"I did several others after Taxidermy, some were not feasible," Mary said.

Later, when the college's public information officer, Rosellen Rankin, left MTI to get married, Mary was offered the job.

"I took it and ran with it," Mary said.

Because she had done so much research on gunsmithing and taxidermy, Mary made valuable contacts at the national level. She wrote and published many articles for the trade magazines about MTI's signature programs. She also wrote weekly articles for the Montgomery Herald about everything at MTI.

"The Herald was our local community recruitment tool," Mary said.

About the time Mary became the full-time PIO she was designing a brochure with Ted Blake's assistant, Sherrill Lowder. Mary described Sherrill as "very artistic." Mary told Sherrill they needed something like a logo to put on everything they handed out. They began to brainstorm and Sherrill drew up a round badge encircling mountains and a tree to signify the Uwharries and Montgomery County.

"Mr. Miles liked it, so we went with it. We started using it around

*"Every single employee knew and subscribed to Phil's mantra – students come first. They were dedicated to education. They were out in the community preaching the gospel of MTI. It was a totally dedicated, student-first institution," Mary said.*

*Mary said, “Writing this series has been a joy because I had the opportunity to renew so many friendships and share so many memories. Every Trailblazer and others we interviewed touched my life those many years ago and will be forever in my heart.”*

1979 or right around there,” Mary said. Later, the logo would undergo one or two changes, but the original mountains are still part of the logo.

Mary’s past employment experiences made her especially empathetic toward women going back to school and getting their education. Instructors Sue Jarvis and Judy Miller were discussing women in their classes and how they felt restrained, and that their employment opportunities were limited once they graduated. Mary, Sue and Judy wanted them to know that there were opportunities out there. They decided to hold a workshop and bring in women with successful careers. They also would invite men in companies and professions who were willing to hire women in various non-traditional careers.

The year was 1980 and the three women were taking a leap of faith. They organized the day-long workshop, provided child care for the day, and invited everyone they could, but were unsure how many would actually show up.

“We had a female helicopter pilot who was a second lieutenant in the National Guard, we had a female career counselor from Chapel Hill, a female semi driver from UPS, a construction company that hired female workers,” Mary said. They had a great workshop planned.

“I was standing out by the parking lot on the morning of the workshop and the cars just kept on coming. I thought at first maybe 20-30 would show up, but I think we had a couple hundred women. I was elated,” she said. “Women wanted better opportunities but had no idea what was out there.” Marvin Miles, MTI president commended the women for their work, saying it was a state-worthy workshop.

“Something that stands out to me as I worked and met with administrators and committees and shared my findings and my opinions. They listened. I remember being somewhat intimidated that they were interested in what I had to say. The women at MTI were decision makers and their opinions were sought. I had never seen that in a workplace. Doris Haywood, Peggy Brewer, Mary Morris Gaffney, Pat Brady, Ann Tarlton, Debbie Morton, Kathy Harris, Sue Agee Jarvis, Judy Miller, were smart, outspoken, confident women and I loved them all,” Mary said.

In 1981 community colleges across the state experienced severe budget cuts and MTI was not immune. One of the positions that was cut was Mary’s. At that time, Lenue “Nudy” James owned the Montgomery Herald and was also chairman of the board of trustees at the college. Nudy offered Mary a job at the Herald and she began working for him when her employment at MTI ended. Nudy was a great supporter of education and of the college, and had Mary to continue writing her articles about the college every week.

“It was like I never left,” she said.

Also in 1981, Mary Perkins became Mary Anderson after marrying Gunsmithing instructor Gene Anderson. Mary and Gene were both separated while they were working at MTI. After a few years they got to know each other while Mary was writing articles about gunsmithing and the other programs. She was working for the Montgomery Herald when she and Gene married. When they returned from their honeymoon, Nudy had changed Mary’s byline from Mary Perkins to Mary Anderson as a surprise for her.

“Mr. James was my mentor and a wonderful person. We had a very close-knit family at the Herald,” Mary said.

Mary’s other mentors were Bruce Turner who was “everybody’s counselor,” Ted Blake who was “the first mate on the MTI ship and always helpful,” and Phil Kissell who “never lost his enthusiasm and endless energy for MCC.”

“Every single employee knew and subscribed to Phil’s mantra – students come first. They were dedicated to education. They were out in the community preaching the gospel of MTI. It was a totally dedicated, student-first institution,” Mary said.

In the summer of 2016, Mary agreed to help gather information and interview the individuals featured in MCC’s 50th anniversary articles that have appeared each week in the Montgomery Herald since January. She knew that a large portion of the information she gathered would be used to create a 50th anniversary commemorative book about the college’s history. The irony was that other information gathered for the book came from articles she wrote while she was MTI’s PIO in the 70s, and later as a reporter for the Herald in the 80s. The archive she created during her employment was so complete and well-organized that a history of the college, its classes, programs and employees, could be pieced together by reading her articles, and that is exactly what happened. As a result, *Blazing the Trail: an anecdotal account of Montgomery Community College’s early years* was published.

Mary said, “Writing this series has been a joy because I had the opportunity to renew so many friendships and share so many memories. Every Trailblazer and others we interviewed touched my life those many years ago and will be forever in my heart.”

# Barney Greene

## Staff

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Barney Greene worked for Montgomery Community College for 36 years. What was it about the college that inspired such loyalty in its employees? Most long-term MCC employees will give the same answer: It's the people. To Greene, his co-workers were his second family.

Greene grew up in Candor and graduated from East Montgomery High School in 1967. From there he got a job with Springs Mills where his father also worked. However, Greene was at loose ends. He didn't know what he wanted to do with the rest of his life, and he wasn't sure mill work was for him.

The U.S. Army put off his decision for a few years as in 1969 he was drafted into the U.S. Army Military Police Corps. He was stationed in Bremerhaven, Germany on the North Sea until 1971. While there, his mother sent him newspaper clippings from the Montgomery Herald. He was able to keep up with what was going on at home and that's where he learned about Montgomery Technical Institute. Once again, he began thinking about what he wanted to do with his life once he was discharged.

"I turned it over to the Lord and asked him to direct me," Greene said.

Looking back, it came as no surprise that Greene's job in the Army's North Sea operations department was shipping and receiving military supplies. It was something that would come back to him as he began a career at MTI.

After being honorably discharged from the military, Greene enrolled at MTI in business administration. He enjoyed the school environment and began to get to know some of the employees during his breaks between classes. One thing led to another, and he started volunteering to help with odd jobs. He did everything from organizing and selling inventory in the bookstore to moving equipment. He even shoveled coal at the old board of education building where MTI was originally located.

"George Simmons was the custodian at that time. He was an older gentleman and I felt like he could use the help, so I would help him shovel coal into the boiler," Greene said. "I did anything someone would allow me to do."

Greene's desire to work got the attention of Ted Blake, who was the director of occupational education at MTI. After Greene graduated with his associate degree in May 1973, he was at loose ends. He worked odd jobs until one evening the summer after he graduated when Ted Blake called him on the phone. Blake invited him to talk with him and MTI President, Marvin Miles, about a job.

Greene said they noticed him when he was in school, volunteering for every available job. They were also impressed with his GPA, and said they wanted to hire him. It was what Greene had been hoping for since coming to MTI as a student. He was hired as evening coordinator on second shift in August of 1973. Then in October of that same year he married his sweetheart, Margaret Faye Rush of Candor.

"I tell people I got married twice in 1973, once to MTI and once to my wife," Greene says. Rush was a graduate of MTI's practical nursing program. She was hired by Montgomery Memorial Hospital on third shift when she graduated in 1973 and still works there.

"As a nurse, Margaret understood commitment to your job. She was always very understanding about the time I put in," Greene said.

As the evening coordinator, Greene looked after the evening operations, helping instructors and students with their needs, overseeing evening maintenance and housekeeping, and making sure the building was secure at night. Because of his penchant for doing anything and everything that came to hand, Greene began to be the "go-to" guy for every job. He learned how to run a printing press, did minor repairs on equipment and operated the bookstore in the evenings in the absence of the bookstore manager.

Greene said jokingly, "I wanted to be trained well enough so that if it came to a situation where the school had to cut people, they couldn't cut me."

It was not long before this "go-to" attitude resulted in more responsibility and Greene was promoted to first shift as a purchasing agent. The position evolved from duties he was already performing as evening coordinator, and as the college grew and programs were added, it became clear that a full-time purchasing agent was needed. Prior to his appointment however, instructors purchased all of their own equipment and supplies themselves. Greene says that several instructors had "good trading skills" and even better contacts in their respective industries.

"Instructors like Gene Anderson (gunsmithing), Mike Ferree (pottery), Lori McAllister (dental assisting), Shirley Jenkins (practical nursing), and Bob Qualls (criminal justice) – those instructors were paramount in getting their programs known in the state and nationwide. They had the right contacts," Greene said.

One of the college's more lucrative acquisitions was made in 1979, when Anderson learned of the U.S. Department of Defense's Tools for Schools program. The Defense Department loaned a certain amount of surplus equipment to schools with vocational programs. The department kept surplus equipment in storage in the event of a major military conflict. Schools could use the equipment with the understanding that they would have to return it if recalled by the Defense Department. The Army would ship the equipment to the school free of charge. The obstacle was that the equipment was stored in a warehouse in Philadelphia, Pa., and Anderson wanted to see if the gunsmithing program could use what was available before he requested it.

Because everyone at the college approached obstacles with the same "whatever it takes" mindset, a warehouse in Philadelphia was just a short day-trip to pilot Ted Blake. Blake procured the use of a plane, and he, Anderson, and Greene flew to Pennsylvania to choose two lathes and a milling machine for the gunsmithing program.

“Nobody ever said, ‘you can’t do that’” Greene said. “You just got it done whatever way you could.” Greene saw purchasing as an avenue to stretch the college’s budget.

“MTI was one of the smallest community colleges in the state and the budget was always tight,” Greene said. Greene was required by the state to have specialized training in State Purchase and Contract requirements. In the years he was employed, Greene literally saw the entire campus built, and most of the equipment and building contracts went through him. One year, while calculating the savings that the college realized through his negotiations, Greene discovered he saved the college more than the amount of his salary. He says he isn’t the only one who put this kind of effort into his job.

“Everyone I worked with cared so much about the college – they wanted to see the school succeed. Administrators put in 12-15 hour days. They didn’t punch a timeclock. They did whatever it took,” Greene said.

He recalls a time just before MTI moved its classes over to the new campus. The building was going up and it was time for the bricks to be laid. Mr. Miles brought housekeeper Willie Chambers and Greene out to the construction site. Bricks were sitting in stacks around the structure and each stack was a different color from very light to very dark. Miles tasked Greene and Chambers with mixing the different colors of brick from each stack and placing them on empty pallets in preparation for the bricklayers.

“The price to have the bricks premixed would have been very expensive,” Greene said, “so we hand-mixed the colors to save money.” Each time a new shipment of bricks arrived, Greene and Chambers mixed the bricks for the bricklayers the following day.

From 1986-1988, Greene attended Gardner-Webb University, earning his B.S. in business administration. He took night classes on MCC’s campus and worked full time during the day.

Then in 1992, the college was between presidents and business managers. Interim president was Bruce Turner and interim business manager was accounting instructor, Mike Lunday. Because Lunday was also teaching full-time, Turner asked Greene to assume responsibility for the maintenance and housekeeping departments that normally fell under the business manager. The move made sense since, not surprisingly, Greene was already spending semester breaks working with the maintenance department stripping and sealing the floors, replacing air handler motors, doing light construction projects – things that could not be accomplished while students were in the buildings.

“The whole time I had been here, I had been involved with maintenance and housekeeping. It was a good promotion for me. I saw my opportunity to advance and use my college degree,” Greene said. Greene was promoted to director of purchasing and physical plant, a position he held until he retired.

During the construction of the Business, Industry, Technology, Resource Center (Building 200), V.P. of administrative services, Dale McInnis, drew on Greene’s 20-plus years of experience to assist him in various phases of the project.

Greene recalls being very familiar with the blueprints of the building, and remembers frequently surveying the ongoing construction. After going around the building several days in a row, Greene kept thinking there was something strange about one of the walls that was being constructed.

“It just didn’t look right. The higher it got, the more noticeable it became,” Greene said.

After consulting the blueprints, Greene and maintenance supervisor, Steve Hamilton, pulled out a tape measure and discovered the bricklayers were one brick off somewhere along the line. They went to the architect, and the contractor had to tear the wall down and start over.

Another time, Greene was walking around the unpaved drive that went to the back of the new building. He noticed the drive narrowed significantly around the curve.

“If two vehicles going in opposite directions were trying to get around the curve at the same time, only one of the vehicles would be able to fit,” Greene said. Once again, he pulled out the blueprints and discovered the drive was five feet narrower in the curve than it was supposed to be. Before the drive was paved, it was widened by five feet.

Greene retired for the first time in 2001. It was a bad budget year for the college and there were going to be layoffs. Some long-time employees, including Greene, decided to retire to allow the school to have the funds to hire replacements at a lower salary and also prevent some layoffs. Mary Kirk was MCC’s president at the time and hired Greene back to work part-time in his old position at his request.

“I loved the school and wanted to keep working. I was already trained. Dr. Kirk said it was a win-win for both of us,” Greene said. Greene retired permanently in 2009.

“I was at MCC for 36 years and when I looked back on it before my final year I thought, ‘Where did the time go?’ I was enjoying it so much, I didn’t keep up with the time,” Greene said.

Greene said the key to Montgomery Community College’s success is that from board of trustees down, they include God in the decision making process.

“I think it says a lot when you’re asking for God’s guidance. It makes a big difference. It’s paramount to a school’s success,” Greene said.

When he retired, Greene worked part-time for Total Power Products (Glover’s Saw and Mower) in Biscoe until he had both knees replaced. When he recovered from that surgery, he mowed yards until recently, when he had rotator cuff surgery. While he’s recovering, he mows a few yards and runs errands for his parents, but it probably won’t be long before he’s busy again.

Members of Greene’s MCC “family” continue to get together every other month at Hometown Bar-B-Que in Troy including Bruce Turner, Peggy Brewer, Gene Anderson and others who worked with him from the beginning. Most had over 30 years with the college.

“The school wouldn’t have grown as it did without those people who stayed with it and saw the potential,” Greene said.



# Bill Price

## Staff

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Bill Price was the ideal choice for Dean of Instruction at Montgomery Technical College in 1984. He was experienced and trained in vocational education and also had the academic credentials to supervise all the curriculum programs.

MTI had become MTC in 1983, the year before Marvin Miles retired and Dr. Benny Hampton became president in 1984. Four years later, the community college system would change the names again and MTC became Montgomery Community College.

Bill was working at Mitchell Community College when Dr. Benny Hampton became president of MCC in 1984 and advertised for a Dean of Instruction.

Bill was dedicated to the original purpose of the community college system to focus on training for existing and emerging occupations to get more people ready to enter the workforce, including technical and mechanical skills.

“I started the same day Wayne Bernauer in the gunsmithing program, which Gene Anderson had built into a model for the community college system,” Bill said.

Bill is pleased with the accomplishments while he was at MCC.

“We standardized the course descriptions of all programs. We took the one-paragraph descriptions that were standard in the community college system and added outlines, objectives and an expanded the descriptions to every course in a program,” he said. “It was a tremendous undertaking. We hired a part-time person to work with instructors and student services. It was most beneficial for course consistency.”

The programs initiated were Forestry, Practical Nurse Re-Certification, Industrial Maintenance, and got approval from SACS (Southern Association of Schools and Colleges) to set up a one-year college transfer program - the first one-year transfer in the N.C. community college system.

Forestry began as a one-year small lot program especially for land owners who wanted to properly take care of their trees. David Isley taught for about three years before he was hired away by a timber corporation.

“David was a super good guy and great teacher,” Bill said.

“There was some politicking going with state education officials, Phil Kissell and Talbert Myers, but we got the approval because we knew it would work and Phil and Talbert convinced the state officials it would work,” Bill said. “Talbert was just a super guy. Phil and Bruce Turner were my mentors to introduce me to the county and the people.”

MCC had an industry sponsored air condition program that trained technicians from all over the state.

Everybody at MCC was really good to work with, Bill said.

“Everybody had the best interest of the students at heart. We knew we would make a difference in their lives. We worked with students to upgrade their skills and learn new skills they could take to other careers.”

Industrial Maintenance was an all-around skills program.

“Art Furr started teaching the day I retired, but I was pleased it was in place. The need is always there for plumbers, electricians and maintenance mechanics. In industry and other fields, transferable skills get people into a lot jobs.”

Auto mechanics and auto body repair were still viable when Bill left MCC, but eventually got swallowed up in technology and the cost of computerized equipment.

“We tried a one-year diploma program and a two-year diploma program. We offered the same courses every quarter, but the programs didn’t survive, especially when the community college system focus turned to academics,” Bill said.

In the business technology classes, MCC replaced a whole classroom of manual typewriters with IBM Selectrics, only to replace them a few years later with computers. Technology was moving fast, in industry and business.

“We did a lot of good things with the limited resources we had,” Bill said. “Instructors and staff stretched every dollar.”

The gunsmithing guys went out and got help from the firearms industry. Grady Goforth was excellent in the print shop, Barney Green was excellent in the purchasing department, Dale McInnis in finance did a good job. Ken Jarvis was sharp, a good man.

Bill’s list of memorable co-workers includes “worker bee” Beth Smith, Kathy Harris in Student Services and Mary Chesson in the classroom.

It was not always smooth sailing and Bill was often a buffer between administration and employees.

“But,” he said, “employees never let anything come between them and the students. Their dedication never wavered.”

Bill retired from MCC in 2002 and spent seven more years in the Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Labor, where he was the high school apprenticeship liaison. He was also in charge of the College Tech Program administrative funds.

He never moved away. Bill and his wife, Sarah, still live in their original home in Woodrun on Tillery.

Sarah has retired from Montgomery County Schools where she started as a high school English teacher, then taught talented and gifted children at all levels.

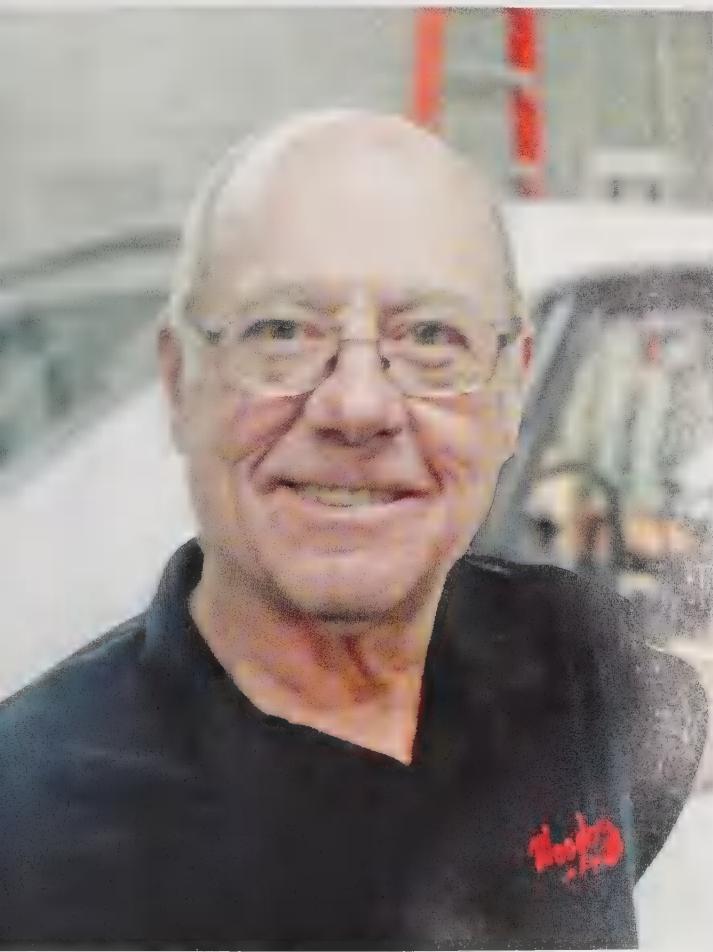
Their two children grew up and established careers in Charlotte and Washington DC.

“We are a balanced family,” Bill joked. “Sarah and I had a son and a daughter and each of them had a son and a daughter. Of course, we adore our four grandchildren.”

Bills heart was always with vocational education.

After he graduated from Lexington high school, he earned an AA degree in auto mechanics from Catawba Valley Community

*MCC is doing just what it ought to be doing and doing it well.”*



College. Then he was drafted into the U.S. Army, but took the option to enlist so he got into aviation. From 1965-1968, he taught aircraft maintenance in the army.

After his discharge, Bill went to Appalachian State University for his bachelor's degree in Industrial Arts/Teaching, his master's degree and Education Specialist degree in Higher Education Administration with a concentration in Adult Education.

During that time, he taught auto mechanics at Caldwell Community College and later became Director of Occupational Education at Catawba Valley Community College.

After he retired from the state education department, Bill got involved in racing Legend Cars for several years and loved it.

Now, Bill is living his mechanical technician dream. He built a two-bay shop in Mt. Gilead where friends and neighbors bring in their own parts and their own tools and, with advice from Bill, work on and restore their own vehicles.

He is on the Woodrun Board of Directors over maintenance, so he keeps the trucks, golf carts and boats in good repair.

“This was something I always wanted to do and am blessed to be able to do it,” he said.

He also served on the Mt. Gilead Redevelopment Committee and the STEP committee. Both groups have brought growth, beauty and pride to Mt. Gilead.

Bill still believes in the community college as the place that has something for everyone to make their lives better.

“The value of MCC to the county is tremendous. It gives people opportunities they otherwise would never have because of finances and travel. MCC is doing just what it ought to be doing and doing it well.”

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# Brenda Ritter

## Staff



Brenda Ritter is grateful for divine guidance in her life. "I know God put me at MCC and gave me the opportunities I had there." God puts us here to do His work as long as we are here," she said. Brenda and her family had relocated to Montgomery County over 30 years ago for her husband's job. When he died suddenly, Brenda was left with two small sons, a 5-year-old and a second grader to raise alone. Brenda was clerical supervisor of personnel at the Montgomery County Health Department, where she continued to work for 16 years. She had taken a few courses at MCC and later took a second parttime job as switchboard operator. That led to offers of a full time job at the college as administrative assistant to then President Dr. Ted Gasper. "I was originally hired by Phil Kissell, whom I call Mr. MCC. He was so devoted to the school. People in the community identified MCC as the college where Phil Kissell worked," she said. "Phil, Bruce Turner and Judy Miller (instructor and head of the business department), were my mentors. They set the example of always being kind, helpful and encouraging, especially to students, and to their co-workers." Brenda was offered the administrative assistant position to President Ted Gasper when Emily Smith moved to another position. "He offered me more money than I was making. He was good to me," Brenda said. The mid-1990s were often tense years at MCC, but Brenda earned the respect of everyone with her professionalism and kind and helpful ways. Anyone who thought the petite, soft-spoken Brenda could be easily manipulated soon found out they were dealing with a steel magnolia whose dignity and principles would not be compromised.

After Dr. Gasper left in 1998, Brenda continued as administrative assistant, working with Bruce Turner when he was interim president and later when he was chairman of the MCC Foundation. When Bruce Turner was named interim president, Talbert Myers took his position and became interim dean of continuing education.

"I loved Talbert. I kept a dish of peanuts on my desk and, if I wasn't at my desk, Talbert would pop in and rattle the lid just to tease me," Brenda said. "I'd say, 'Talbert, are you in my peanuts again?' and hear him laughing." When Mary Kirk was hired as president in 1999, Brenda stayed on as her administrative assistant.

"When she came in, the atmosphere at MCC changed immediately. She was a delight and we became friends," Brenda said. Brenda was also secretary to the Board of Trustees. "Board Chair Gelynda Capel is a sweetheart. She was so good to work with. She is a very smart person and so kind to everyone. When I think about her, I think about how much she cares about MCC students." Brenda retired in

2008 at age 65 to care for her mother, who had Alzheimers and was getting progressively worse.

"I was her only child. I had to bring her here to be her caregiver. She was always there for me and I was glad I could take care of her when she needed me most," Brenda said. Since retirement and her mother's passing, Brenda stepped back into the role of administrative assistant to President Kirk when Korrie Ervin, who replaced Brenda, was on maternity leave.

Brenda said she missed working because MCC employees were like family. "It was like home to me. Everybody worked hard and worked together. We were a family with a mission to give our students the best education they could get." MCC helped create jobs and train people to work with a good education that they could afford," she said. Brenda said one of MCC's greatest values is that it can serve people who are older, who have families and have jobs, but can get their education and training right here at home. "We worked to make schedules convenient, to help people of all ages and backgrounds feel comfortable and help them better themselves. It was all about the students," Brenda said. "It was great when we got approved for college transfer classes. That brought in a lot of young people just out of high school. Our student body was so diverse and it was great."

Brenda said MCC's specialty programs – pottery, gunsmithing, taxidermy, metal engraving and forestry – brought in so many different people from different backgrounds, different states and even a few foreign countries, who brought new perspectives to the college.

"We are lucky to have MCC in Montgomery County. It was a good place to work," Brenda said. "I know God put me there, where I supposed to be." Last week, the day before open heart surgery, Brenda had lunch with a group of past and present MCC employees and was as cheerful and optimistic as ever.

According to family members, she is recovering nicely and looking forward to getting back to her church, First Wesleyan in Troy, where she teaches 3rd and 4th graders.

*"I loved Talbert. I kept a dish of peanuts on my desk and, if I wasn't at my desk, Talbert would pop in and rattle the lid just to tease me."*



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# Chuck Marsh

## Staff



With two of the best qualified adult education administrators in the state, Chuck Marsh and Bruce Turner, MTI had the perfect team to introduce Montgomery County adults of all ages to the benefits of learning and higher education. Both were as committed to adult and vocational education as MTI's first president, David Bland.

Rupert "Chuck" Marsh was recruited to be the Director of Extension initiate and administer the Manpower Development Training Act at Montgomery Technical Institute in 1968.

Chuck was recruited by Bland, who knew Chuck's work at Durham Technical College as ABE (Adult Basic Education) Coordinator.

Bruce Turner was recommended by the N.C. Department of Education for his work with McGraw-Hill Education ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Exam). President Bland was also involved in the ABLE Program,

which was being field tested. Bruce was also a GED test administrator.

"We made a lot of friends and we had a lot of fun," Chuck said.

"I never worked with anyone I admired more," Bruce said. "Chuck was one of the smartest and probably the most creative person I have ever met."

Always ready with a joke, Chuck deflected the praise.

"I think Bruce still owes me money,"

Chuck got into adult education at Durham Tech when he caught the enthusiasm of a student named Adrienne.

"The first (adult education) class I ever taught was in a little section of town next to the old baseball stadium. Adrienne was not illiterate, just trying to get a high school education after working all her life and putting five kids through college," he recalled. "Adrienne led that class. When someone was absent, Adrienne found out why. Her kind of enthusiasm got me hyped up and into adult education. Once you start feeling it, then it happens."

Chuck said spreading that enthusiasm into Montgomery County was easy and it was not easy.

It was easy because, Chuck said, because he believes in people.

"I have never stopped being amazed at what people can do. They have incredible talent and don't realize how great it is."

When Chuck talks about talent, he includes intellectual ability, organizational skills, and all creativity.

Chuck said he and Bruce recognized the unlimited talent in the county. People were making things and doing things that had been handed down for generations, but didn't know what a special talent they had.

Chuck said Bruce had the same basic approach.

"The people were not backwards; they just didn't know how smart they were or what special talents they had," he said. "Recruitment was my major responsibility. We (MTI staff) spent a lot of time on

recruiting, putting our heads together on what to teach and how to get people to come and take classes. First, we took the classes to them."

Marsh said their beginning was going out and cleaning the swamp, digging out a lot of stumps.

People didn't want to admit they could not read and write.

Chuck took a backwoods preacher approach to reach out to them.

They cooked a hog or two, gathering people who were local legends at it and evangelizing to them about education.

"Bruce and I went out and put in a class anywhere we could find eight or ten people who were interested - anywhere from the middle of a swamp to tiny little churches."

Word-of-mouth has always been the best advertising and the students in those small classes were proud of their accomplishments. They were earning GEDs and adult high school diplomas. They were expanding their artistic talents. They told their families and friends.

Dwight Holland had begun teaching night classes in art in 1967, before Chuck arrived in Troy, and students loved it.

"We even had a lapidary and jewelry making class. Elma Miller, a kind and sweet little woman, took the class and then went to work in the business office at MTI," Chuck recalled.

Chuck went on several rock hunting excursions with Archie Craven, lapidary instructor, who also collected turtles. One excursion was also Chuck's first experience firing dynamite. Just one more memorable occasion, he said.

"Elma Miller was cut from the same cloth as Virginia Jones, an angel who walked. She was one of my favorite people ever," Chuck said.

Virginia was MTI's business manager and her husband, Decatur, was personnel director.

"Like everybody who worked at MTI in those early days, they had a title, but did whatever they needed to do for instructors and students.

"Virginia never had a negative or unkind word about anybody. I remember when Decatur would become frustrated with someone, Virginia would calm him down in her kind, sweet way."

Chuck said there was a lot of behind the scenes work going on gathering background for future classes.

Pottery was a natural for Montgomery County, but there was resistance from the historic potters working in Montgomery, Moore and Randolph counties. Eventually, the potters did support the school and hired many graduates as interns.

After Chuck retired, he acknowledged his "abiding interest in pottery" and opened his own successful shop.

"I haven't turned a pot in three years now," he said. "You have to be physically strong and have a lot of stamina to be a potter. I don't have the strength and stamina any more."

Back then, they were also in meetings with other schools who had law enforcement programs and other possible programs at MTI.

MTI's Emergency Management Technician program was one of the most successful in the state.

"Bruce and I busted our butts on researching future programs, some that came to be years after I left," Chuck said. "We cleared the land, planted the seed and fertilized the fields."

Chuck said one of MTI's best decisions was to hire Phil Kissell.

"Phil is a good person. He was active and proactive and knew everybody in the county. I liked his approach to doing things," Chuck said. "We could count on Phil. I always felt like he had my back."

Chuck left MTI after about seven years, but Bruce and Phil stayed to

*“Shirley and I have a patchwork history. We helped each other on some issues and disagreed on others, but I never doubted her ability.”*

retire and then stay on part time.

Chuck said MTI employees were a dedicated bunch of people, determined to see their college succeed.

Pat Mashburn Brady was Chuck's first secretary and set the standard for all secretaries to follow.

“I loved that gal,” Chuck said. “She was so fast, so accurate and had an incredible memory. She was so good at her job and knew half the people in the county.”

Pat had become Chuck's right hand when Peggy Brewer took over the “bookstore,” which was still a filing cabinet of textbooks and student account.

“Sweet Peggy. She was a good solid woman,” Chuck recalls.

Not everybody saw eye-to-eye all the time, but there was always mutual respect and, yes, admiration for each other's abilities. Shirley Jenkins started the Practical Nursing Program and contributed a lot to the nursing area.

“Shirley and I have a patchwork history. We helped each other on some issues and disagreed on others, but I never doubted her ability,” Chuck said.

Ron Kincaid, assistant to President David Bland, and Chuck, in spite of being “political opposites,” Chuck said, laughing, “had a lot of pretty good history. Ron was a good guy with a lot of good ideas.”

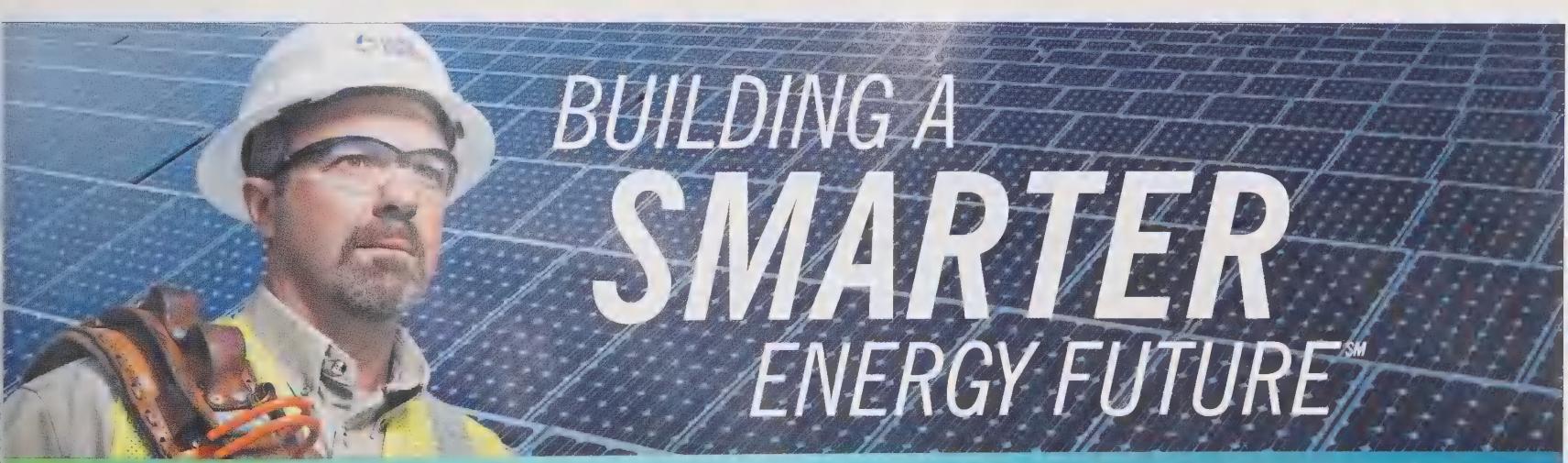
Before Chuck came to MTI, he had taught at Durham High School and found his calling teaching night adult education classes at Durham Technical Institute.

Originally from Rutherford County, he had graduated from UNC Chapel Hill.

When Chuck left MTI, he worked in the public school system for two years, then worked at Gilead Mfg. before he became a textile consultant for major manufacturers for 22 years.

He retired in Griffin, GA where health issues cut short his pottery hobby.

“I don't do much of anything these days, but I am still amazed by the talents people have and what they can do.”



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# Dale McInnis

## Staff

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“This brings back a lot of memories. The campus looks great,” said Dr. Dale McInnis, president of Richmond Community College after a tour of Montgomery Community College with President Dr. Chad Bledsoe. Potential for the new high school next door and the early college is exciting, Dale said. Richmond Community College has had an early college high school for nearly a decade, so he knows the benefits firsthand.

During his tenure at MCC, Dale McInnis started as an instructor in business education in 1992 and left a decade later as vice-president of administrative services. He was one of the most popular, respected and genuinely liked teachers and administrators at MCC.

Dale’s visit to Troy turned into a mini-reunion of sharing stories and laughing with former fellow employees at lunch hosted by Dr. Bledsoe. Dale pointed to Judy Miller, retired head of the business department who had come from Salisbury, and said, “You recommended me,” and, pointing out Bruce Turner, “You hired me,” and to Phil Kissell, “You were my role model.” Earlier, Dale had said his MCC family would never know how much he appreciated the opportunity to work there and for what they had taught him. “Who I am today was shaped by what I learned at MCC,” Dale said. “I am indebted to Phil, Bruce and many others. I am implementing dreams and visions today that we talked about back then. We were a good team.” Because of Phil, Dale said he overhauled his approach to advising students. “Phil focused on students. He was a good listener and had the ability to see things from a student’s perspective. He didn’t ask what they wanted to major in, but what they wanted to be,” Dale said. “Bruce was the heart and soul of MCC. He knew how to get through to people and had an amazing recall. He never forgot anything.” Dale said his contribution to the team was being a good analyst. “I could look at the facts and come to a conclusion, but I did get impatient with Phil and Bruce when I thought they were taking too long to make the obvious decision.” Dale said MCC was “absolutely critical” to Montgomery County, a source of great pride for the citizens. Having many of the same staff for so many years has provided continuity and stability, especially in times of economic turmoil when people needed a safety line and MCC was there with adult education programs and training, he said. “MCC has a unique identity that separates it from other colleges in the system and gives it a unique brand,” Dale said. “Everyone here has always felt like they were fighting for the people.”

Dale said Beth Smith, now vice-president of student services, was among those long-term employees essential to the stability and growth of MCC. Peggy Brewer was awesome in the book store. She was in charge of all accounts receivable, including tuition payments, which were still done on paper, a system that was already antiquated in 1993.

Ann Tarleton was a natural with technology as computers came into the offices. Dale recalled that all emails came to Ann, who then printed them out and distributed them. President Dr. Ted Gasper (1993-1998) saw the technology revolution coming and began pushing early on to integrate computers in the classrooms. MCC got a dedicated T-1 line which was later replaced by the Internet.

“Will Johnson was our technology guru. Will was smart and creative. We had an Information Highway room where Will brought in classes from other colleges. People saw that there was a different world out there,” Dale said. “We saw the future coming and Will laid the foundation at MCC.”

Dale started his career as lead instructor for business administration at MCC on Sept. 1, 1992, one week before classes started, but he was not a novice in the classroom. He had teaching experience as an adjunct professor for Richmond Community College and Gardner Webb University. However MCC did come with a new experience – teaching in the medium security prison in Troy.

“I had never even been in a prison before, but it was a good experience,” he said. Dale had attended N.C. State University and Sandhills Community College before receiving a bachelor’s degree in business management from UNC Pembroke in 1988. He had earned his master’s degree in business management from Campbell University.

“MCC was just 22 years old and everybody wore a lot of hats to get things done. Phil, Art Furr (now chair of Industrial Systems Technology) and Barney Green (purchasing agent) were our dynamic trio to get things done. Barney was a trooper, a really nice guy,” Dale said. “People ate lunch together and talked about everything. We got to know the students and everybody spoke to each other. If you didn’t say hey, they would think something was wrong. I also made good friends in the community.”

Dale had roots in Montgomery County when he came here. He and his two brothers were raised on a farm near Norman in Richmond County, just half-a-mile from the county line. He had a Candor address and went to elementary school in Candor. He still has fond memories of Katherine Fox, his kindergarten teacher. “We did all our shopping in Candor and Troy because it was more convenient,” he said.

His son, Ryan, was born in 1994 and was one of the “MCCbabies.” “He loved the taxidermy classroom, especially the big Kodiak bear David Williams had in there,” Dale said. Ryan graduated from NCSU last year with a degree in agri-business management. In 1993, Dr. Ted Gasper was hired as president and he hired Dale as dean of administrative services. Mike Lunday had been serving as interim finance officer, but really wanted to be back in the classroom, so he was happy to help Dale transition to that position. For the next five years, MCC made great strides in technology and Building 200 was constructed, but there was a tense atmosphere that affected the previous camaraderie among employees. Turnover of staff and instructors was high. “Because I was young and inexperienced, some thought I could be manipulated, but I knew right from wrong,” Dale said. In 1992, the N.C. Legislature had approved state bonds for community college construction, but the money required a county match. With a planning grant to come up with a model, architects had built a three-dimensional cardboard model of the building for presentations. Dr. Charles Highsmith and D.T. Scarborough were the trustees who made the presentation to the county commissioners. Gary McCaskill was the county manager. Dale laughs about



opposition from a neighboring college which opposed MCC's getting so much of the available funds by saying MCC's projections for the building were based on "specious information." "We all just looked at each other because we didn't know what 'specious' meant," he said. (Specious: Superficially plausible, but actually wrong.) Dale concedes now that maybe the moveable walls weren't such a good idea. The matching funds were approved but first MCC had to deed the property to the county to be retitled back to MCC when the bonds were paid off in 20 years. Another first for MCC, Dale said. "It was innovative at the time, but has since become a model for many other colleges," he said. "Construction was an experience and an adventure. I was 28 years old and had never built anything but a birdhouse. I had to deal with multi-prime contractors and try to keep things rolling. We ran into a lot of problems, but got them all worked out."

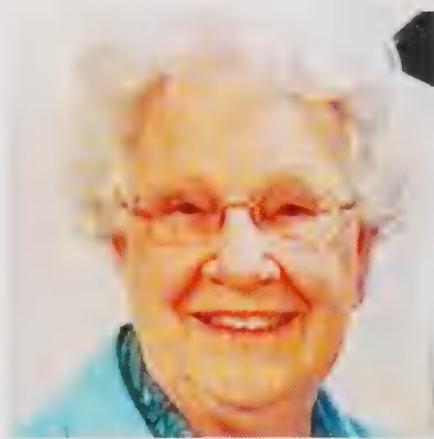
The crew digging the foundation uncovered a headstone from a grave. That stopped all work until a search for a cemetery turned up nothing and the conclusion was that the headstone had just been thrown away. A brick wall was out-of-plumb and had to be rebuilt. "Fortunately, I still have good relations with those contractors and architects," Dale said. Internally, employees worked in an atmosphere of stress and uncertainty. Phil, Talbert Myers and Dale were the buffers, trusting each other as they identified and headed off crises. Yet, Dale said, Ted Gasper was a brilliant man with a measure of genius to him. MCC continued to progress. EMS and medical assisting programs were thriving. Russell Strong took ownership of his forestry program and got state approval for a two-year-degree. Gunsmithing had obtained two-year degree status and continued rapid growth. Integrated technology was in offices and classrooms and the NC Information Highway was implemented, soon to be supplanted by the Internet. When Peggy Brewer announced her retirement, the bookstore, with up-to-date technology, was outsourced. Dale converted the budget from calculator-based to a spreadsheet he created. "There was a lot of trial and error," he said, "but that same spreadsheet, with individual modifications, is now used in every community college," he said. Dale said small colleges have to fight for survival. "They have to be creative and flexible. I had to learn about every aspect of every job. I continued to learn from Bruce and Phil, the voices of reason, things that I still use today," Dale said. "Bruce became interim president for the second time in 1998-1999 and, with a strong team of employees, we had a really good year." Dr. Mary Kirk was hired as president in 1999. In 2001, Dale received an offer from Southern Piedmont Community College as a vice-president and left MCC. The next year, he was offered the vice-president for administration at Richmond Community College and became executive vice-president in 2006. He had received his Ph.D. in higher education administration from N.C. State University in 2002. "I didn't think I wanted to be a college president, but when Dr. Joe Grimsley (president of Richmond CC) passed away in 2010, I knew I wanted the job," Dale said. "I wouldn't be able to do what I do now if I hadn't been here," Dale said of MCC. "I was shaped, I was forged, by my time here and it made me tough. I am proud of what we accomplished here and what MCC has continued to do." Dale has spearheaded his own signature program at Richmond CC. In cooperation with Duke Power, Richmond CC trains linemen for power companies.

It was a chance conversation with a Duke Progress Energy employee who said it took a long time to train linemen. Richmond CC invented the curriculum that no other college has. Dale said it is a high-cost program that requires a lot of expensive equipment, but they have 130 students from all over the country.

# Doris Haywood

## Staff

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This week, Doris Haywood shares some of her memories of her nearly 20 years studying and working at Montgomery Community College.

Doris was herself often a student and was known and loved by students and staff.

For the past two-and-a-half years, Doris has been battling serious illness and has limited energy, but fighter that she is, never let it take away her good humor or love of learning and sharing.

Doris lives in Burlington. Her email is dorishaywood@yahoo.com. In her own words, Doris Haywood remembers her career at Montgomery Technical Institute.

Montgomery Technical Institute was still young when I became a student.

In the winter of 1968/69, there was an advertisement in the Montgomery Herald announcing a class on how to prepare one's own income tax returns. I signed up and started the class, which was taught by Lynnie Comer. When I walked in the door, I was hooked. By the time I finished the class, I had already begun thinking about taking secretarial classes.

The first order of business was to get a high school diploma. I had dropped out of high school in my junior year to work and help the family, but I had read as much as possible since that time. Bruce Turner was coordinator of the learning center. He scheduled the required series of exams, and in a short time, I had earned the GED diploma (General Education Development). At the time I was working and had a family, and couldn't go to school full time. The teachers I remember best were Ellen Turner, Judy Miller, and Ken Jarvis. They were excellent instructors.

In the fall of 1970, my friend Peggy Brewer told me the school needed a part-time evening receptionist, and I applied for the job. It meant I would have to cut back on my own classes, but I would gain experience for the future. The receptionist job was mostly typing, answering the phone, taking messages, and receiving registration fees. On one particular registration evening, there was a long line of students down the hall waiting to pay tuition. The cash box was running low on change, so I went down the hall pulling out the students who had the correct change and brought them to the front of the line. It worked out very well, but I was a bit surprised that nobody got angry about the wait. In fact I think they enjoyed joking about who was next. Most of the students were local and knew each other.

MTI was housed in the old building on Page Street in front of the Montgomery County school bus garage. The circular school driveway met with the drive to the bus garage at the corner of the

building. When leaving our parking space, we had to be careful not to get run over by the mechanics who always seemed to be in a hurry.

The following year, one of the secretaries left on maternity leave and didn't return after the birth of her baby. I was hired full-time to fill the vacant position. I was secretary to two administrators – directors of student services and curriculum programs. Sometimes there was a conflict when both bosses needed a job done on the same schedule. When that happened, I asked them to work it out themselves and let me know which job to complete first. As far as I know, there weren't any fights about it.

My job was to keep up with student records and staff files, and do correspondence for both departments. The student body was so small I did the quarterly grade cards by hand on 5 X 8 index cards.

The budget was bare bones with no money for decorations or frills. One year at Christmas, I went out in the fields and woods to collect magnolia, pine, holly greens and berries to make a wreath for the outside front wall. We dumped it in one of the back shop rooms and proceeded to fashion a large wreath. I brought pinecones, wire, tools, and ribbon from home to finish the job. It looked pretty festive for a homemade wreath.

By 1973, I had completed the two-year secretarial science program, which included a shorthand course. One of the registrars commented later that "Doris has struck again" when she ran across some shorthand notes in the student files. I was thinking in shorthand, and it didn't occur to me that the next person might not be able to read it. In the '70's and '80's, speed, accuracy, and legibility were very important. We used those electric IBM typewriters with a correction tape or used liquid paper to correct mistakes. The cost of a typewriter was almost \$1000; however, now in the computer age, they are worthless. In fact, you can't even find one at a flea market. And my speed typing and shorthand is obsolete too. I couldn't earn a living today with those skills.

The school kept growing and eventually a new and bigger place was constructed. I think moving day was some time in 1977. Everybody had to work to get things done. I guess there was no money to pay movers. The men did the heavy lifting of equipment and furniture, while the women drove the trucks and moved supplies. On one trip a refrigerator fell off the truck, and it caused a slight delay while it was retrieved. We used anything that had wheels to move items. I don't know how many trips I made into the new building pushing a wheeled secretarial chair with books stacked on it. After a weekend of moving, some of the men said they were so dirty, they threw their clothes in the garbage instead of trying to clean them.

There were lots of interesting students who excelled in their fields of study. It wasn't unusual for employees to be good friends with students. One curriculum student (I think his name was Jim) made a

habit of discussing things with Ted Blake and complimenting him on the nice ties he wore every day. So on graduation day, Mr. Blake removed his tie and gave it to Jim as a keepsake reminder of his accomplishments.

I guess you could say I was a perpetual student. I began taking more accounting courses and also sat for the CPS exam (certified professional secretary). The CPS exam is a two-day, five part exam. The student furnishes all equipment and supplies. So I loaded up my typewriter, steno pads, and other supplies and headed out for Winston Salem. The day before I left, I pulled a muscle in my back and could hardly walk. But I was determined not to miss my chance. I took plenty of pain medicine along just in case I needed it. Sitting all day for two days was probably the best thing I could have done. By the time I returned home, my back was better. And, I actually passed the exam.

At the new school, things were restructured, and I ended up working as assistant to the president and secretary to the dean of instruction. I took minutes for the board of trustees, did correspondence, made out schedules for rooms and classes, and kept updated staff files. On one occasion an advisory committee dinner meeting was scheduled and I was assigned the duty of decorating the room. As I said before, money was limited. It was fall, so I decided to make arrangements with colored leaves. As the weather got cooler and cooler, I watched the trees and shrubs every day to see how much color was still hanging on. There was



## *This is Doris Haywood's story of her career at Montgomery Community College.*

*She is the perfect example of an intelligent, talented woman whose education was interrupted by a family situation, but who went to Montgomery Technical Institute when it was new and grew with the college, first as a student, then on through several college degrees to become business manager.*

*Kathy Harris, fellow employee, said Doris was a role model for women at MTI.*

*"She was always positive, efficient and professional.*

*We all aspired to be like Doris," Kathy said.*

*Peggy Brewer had started the bookstore at MTI and was glad to recommend Doris for her first job there.*

*"Our friendship goes back to when we were young girls and frequent visitors in each other's homes.*

*When we were teenagers, we worked together at Kress Five & Dime Store in Troy," Peggy said.*

*Doris was secretary to Dean of Instruction Ted Blake and Marvin Miles. Ted and Doris have remained close friends over the years.*

*"Doris was then, and remains to this day, one of the sweetest, kindest and most talented people I have ever known," Ted said.*

*Since she retired, Doris has continued her love of learning and always has a project she is working on.*

*She has researched the Haywood Family history. Her Christmas gift to family members was their story and the Haywood legacy.*

*Doris was also a talented designer. She worked on early MTI brochures and recruiting literature.*

*She mentions decorating for special occasions. The staff joked that Doris had a closet in her house with 12 shelves, one for each holiday, where she kept just the right decorations and accessories. The administration counted on her to find the perfect seasonal decorations with natural elements. She said she just kept looking around her, but she had an eye for beauty in everything.*

o plan B. Finally the day of the meeting came, and I was relieved to find plenty beautiful red, yellow, and orange leaves to arrange with gourds and little pumpkins. Whew!!

MTI had a visiting artist who made a big impression on me. On the back hall of the main building, there was a ramp down to the top area. The artist painted a large mural on the wall behind the ramp. It depicted scenes from rural Montgomery County and cleverly incorporated some of our curriculum programs into the artwork. Main focus was a church in the background with a car speeding along the highway in the foreground.

One year I was impressed to learn a lady had registered for the automotive mechanics class. On the first day of class, she arrived wearing bright yellow pair of shorts and tank top. She was rather voluptuous and the outfit didn't hide her much. I never saw her again. We didn't have a dress code. But I suppose she realized she wasn't really interested in auto mechanics or she decided it wasn't the best place to show off her fashion expertise.

At some point, we were visited by the personnel from the Association of Colleges and Schools for accreditation. It amounted to a lot of extra work to prepare, but it turned out okay. We wined and dined them with egg salad and pimento cheese sandwiches, pickles, and strong coffee. I still remember one of the association members always wore a silver butterfly pin on her shoulder.

We were privileged to watch a sweet romance between two instructors, Sue Agee and Ben Jarvis. Sue had adopted a little girl named AnnMarie, whom we all fell in love with. A little later when Sue became engaged, AnnMarie told, "Me and Mama are getting married and I have learned to spell Jarvis."

We had a custodian who was disabled and sometimes slow, but he was serious about his job.

One of his favorite foods was fresh fish. So on the occasions when the president, Marvin Miles, went on a fishing excursion, he always brought a bundle of fish wrapped in newspaper for Willie. One day Willie told us that his wife had passed away. They were out riding in the car, when she suddenly slumped over. He said he knew she was dead before he even stopped the car. I felt sorry for him; he was such a gentle soul.

By the early 1980's I had completed requirements for the two-year accounting degree. In the meantime, MTI had contracted with Gardner-Webb College to offer classes on the MTI campus toward a four-year degree. So I signed up and started classes. The course was tough – evening classes four nights per week for two years. I spent most holidays and school breaks doing research and special projects. At last, in 1985, I proudly marched across the Gardner-Webb stage to receive my bachelor's degree in business management. I had worked in the business office a couple of years while earning my degree. None of my education would have been possible if not for the location of MTI. It definitely changed my life.

In the fall after graduating from Gardner-Webb, I took a job at another community college in Wilson as Dean of Finance. Commuting every week took its toll on me, and I only stayed there two years. I returned to Montgomery County and worked for Jordan Lumber until I retired in 1999.

I would like to mention names of special friends at Montgomery Community College, but there are too many. I would surely leave somebody out. The 15 years I worked there was a joy. Administrators, instructors, students, and support staff were very professional and committed. It was like a big family, thanks to an outstanding president who knew how to hire good people.

# Kathy Harris

## Staff

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Kathy Harris was canning peaches when Biscoe Police Chief Wayne Wooten knocked on her kitchen door. Her first reaction was uncertainty and panic, but Chief Wooten had a message for her to call Sue Agee at Montgomery Technical Institute. That day in 1979, Kathy Harris said, was the day God chose to plant her where she needed to be for the next 30 plus years.

Agee and Judy Miller wanted her to interview for the part-time faculty secretary job. They knew she lived in Biscoe since moving back to Montgomery County from Sanford, as she had been their student at MTI. "Ms. Agee had said in professional development class that we should be prepared to change jobs every 3-5 years to prevent job burnout. I was fortunate to be able to do that, but they were all at MCC," Harris said.

Starting with that part time faculty secretary job, she progressed to receptionist/secretary to Student Services, to Admissions/Public Relations Officer, Admissions/Financial Aid Officer, Registrar/VA Certifying Officer, Coordinator of Student Services/Registrar, Dean of Students, and retired in 2010 as Vice President of Student Services. Along the way, she took classes to earn associate degrees in Secretarial Science and Business Administration from MCC in 1982, bachelor of science degree in Business Management from Gardner-Webb University and a masters degree in Business Administration from Pfeiffer University. After receiving her MBA, Harris taught as an adjunct for Gardner Webb University and for two years, she taught evening classes in Business Education at MCC.

"I grew up at MCC," she said. "But, as I got older, I became "Mom" to the younger students I treated them like my kids, including giving them a scolding when they needed one." Kathy laughed. "I can't tell you how many pairs of pants I have hemmed, buttons I have sewn on and graduation gowns I have pressed, and how many real worried moms I have consoled." Kathy said the support staff at MCC did whatever they needed to do for students. "We were all counselors. I have seen faculty and administrators pay electric bills and buy groceries for students. It was truly a family atmosphere," she said.

Kathy worked for all presidents except the first (David Bland) and was there at least part of five decades. "When I started, MCC was barely into the new building. It was so new, shiny and impressive. But MCC was the people. They were the greatest group of people from the top down," Kathy said. "And, I had the opportunity to work with the most amazing students on the face of the earth. We knew them, knew their names, and in most cases, knew their families. We wanted to see each student succeed. So many have told us how they were encouraged by employees speaking to them by name."

She was also awed at the reputation the pottery program had built. "When I met the first student from Japan (Susumu Ikuta) taking pottery, I wondered how in the world he heard about us. He was the first of many foreign students to come to MCC. Soon, we didn't even blink when students came from all over the state, the United States and the world."

As Public Information Officer, Kathy initiated a campaign to combine marketing efforts for the college's unique programs as national advertising was quite expensive. She worked with faculty members to determine which avenues to pursue and those efforts

paid off as the college's reputation for quality programming quickly grew nationally. "We got to the point where magazine journalist were calling us and wanting to do interviews with our faculty and students. It was quite exciting" she said.

One of her favorite jobs was nine years as the certifying official for veterans. "I met some of the most amazing human beings. The veterans were awesome students. We all did anything we could to ease them back into civilian society, into the classroom and into jobs. That was so rewarding." One who stood out was Gary Miller, a gunsmithing student who came from California with his bandana-wearing dog, named Dawg, riding on the back of his motorcycle. Around here, he was a celebrity as he and Dawg were featured in the newspaper and on TV.

Another special group was those EMS students who went with instructor Brian Raming to New York after the 9-11 attacks. They wanted to go and help. "That's just the kind of students we had. But it was also very difficult to send them off to face 'whatever.' We had so many special people to come through the doors at MCC over the years; each and every one unique and special in their own way."

One of our biggest challenges was that a small college like MCC has to provide the same services for students as the biggest ones and employees have to be willing to wear many hats. "We were part of that college and it was part of us," she said. "We were all in community service, and like a family, had to be there for each other and our students." They stepped up to do campus tours for visiting students and their families,



*"I met some of the most amazing human beings. The veterans were awesome students. We all did anything we could to ease them back into civilian society, into the classroom and into jobs. That was so rewarding."*

seven days a week, and showed them around town. They helped find housing. They counseled the homesick, those with personal issues and those who were grieving. They celebrated with all good news, especially when a student was encouraged not to give up and then succeeded.

"The success rate at MCC was phenomenal," Kathy said. "The practical nursing students all passed the state exams to become licensed practical nurses and we celebrated every year when they could put LPN after their names. The same was true with our BLET students – when they passed that state exam, we celebrated with them. We were thrilled with every graduation and all the success stories, some in spite of great odds and some who had overcome great obstacles. I believe in what we teach and do at MCC."

Kathy said MCC students were not always the typical high school graduates, but people of all ages, people with jobs, with families and responsibilities, who knew that an education would make them a better person and give them and their families a better life.

Classes that got a foothold in Continuing Education had become curriculum courses in the early 1970s. In the 1970 fall quarter, MTI had 83 students in six programs. In five years, that number had grown to 335 and in the fall of 1981, 444 curriculum students were attending 16 curriculum programs. That does not include the hundreds more in adult education and continuing education classes.

Kathy was involved in three SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) accreditations, each a year-long process of preparation that included every employee. As the community college system changed over the years, more emphasis was placed on academic classes and college transfer, which is a good thing, Kathy said, but it created issues for the vocational programs. "The state had parameters to measure success, but our main goal was for students to enhance their skills and get jobs. For instance, a gunsmithing student who graduated and got a job as a machinist using the skills he learned in gunsmithing, did not fit the state parameters because he didn't go to work in his major field," Kathy said that was frustrating because so many graduates took their skills to jobs outside their major. They were very successful, but didn't fit the state standard for success.

She kept doing her job and moving up every three to five years, according to the predictors of success in the business world, but that never changed the perception of MCC as a place where employees knew and cared about every student.

Now, Kathy goes to her grandson's ball games. "Almost every game, a former MCC student comes up to me with a hug and a thank you for their experience at MCC. Those are happy and touching moments," she said. "And that is why MCC has succeeded and why we are there."

**Happy  
50th  
Anniversary,  
MCC!**



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# Phil Kissell

## Staff



Phil Kissell went to work at Montgomery Technical Institute in August 1970, a year before college charter was approved by the State Board of Education. He officially retired in 2001, but continued to work under contract for eight more years. His life was so intertwined with the college, it was identified as the place Phil Kissell worked.

Kissell started as the second shift director of the learning lab/library and retired as vice-president of academic affairs and student services. He knew the college from the ground up and took the lead on issues as the school grew.

"There were times when we were in survival mode, but the constant factor was that we cared about people and we knew how much the citizens needed this opportunity for higher education and job training," Phil said recently as he recalled his career that spanned the first five presidents.

"One of the smartest moves MTI made was to hire Phil Kissell," said Bruce Turner, who was also one of MTI's first employees.

"Phil was recognized as a local boy whom everybody knew and everybody knew his family, who for generations had been dedicated to public service in Montgomery County. Phil was one of the most respected and trusted members of the college administration by the public."

Phil had graduated from East Montgomery High School and earned a bachelor's degree from UNC Chapel Hill. He had come home to teach and coach. Later, he earned his master's degree in higher education administration from Appalachian State University.

Phil joined the small staff and jumped right into the mission of recruiting students, including talking to a group of Springs Mills third-shift employees about taking GED classes at 3:30 a.m.

GED (General Education Diploma) classes were set up anywhere a group wanted to earn a high school diploma.

In the early years, MTI had just a handful of employees.

"We learned to do whatever needed to be done. We all worked and stayed together. We put our lives into the school," Phil said. "With all the obstacles it faced, it is amazing the school has made it 50 years."

People, staff, students and citizens, made the difference.

"Early on, we spent a lot of time in a counseling/advising mode to build self-confidence in people to convince them that they could go back to school; they could get a high school diploma; they could learn a trade. Many people were actually afraid to set foot on a college campus because they didn't believe in themselves," Phil said.

The reward for working long hours and late nights has been people who come back to thank them for what the college has done for them.

"That touches us all," Phil said.

When Phil started in 1970, MTI had 83 students in six programs.

Growth continued. MTI was approved to renovate the old Ford dealership building on South Main Street in Troy. It became known as "the annex" and housed continuing education programs in textiles, upholstery, carpentry, ceramics and auto mechanics.

Growth continued and more space was needed.

Phil said Col. Reese Blair, retired U.S. Army scientist with a passion for education, stepped up with the answer to their prayers. The Blair family donated 76 acres to build a community college.

Montgomery County and MTI officials launched a \$975,000 bond drive.

Phil said the employees united to canvass the county to get support for the bond.

"It was a nerve-wracking time, because if we were to survive, it had to pass," Phil said.

The bond passed and the new building brought the school, scattered among three buildings, under one roof.

The dedication was on June 12, 1977. Enrollment had increased to 407 students.

In 1983, MTI became Montgomery Technical College and five years later, became Montgomery Community College.

Growth meant more responsibilities, but the students were Phil's focus throughout his career. One of the highlights of his career was accreditation by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges in December 1978 after a year-long self study.

"That first accreditation validated everything we had been doing to meet the educational needs of Montgomery County citizens," Phil said.

"We had day and night classes but we didn't have the resources to hire additional personnel, so we split shifts, worked day and night and did what we had to do for the students," Phil said.

"Students are the backbone of the college. We cared about them, worked with them through academic, financial and personal issues. You don't survive unless you put the students first."

The college made good policies, procedures and sound decisions

## How he got the job

*Phil answered an intriguing ad posted by Bruce Turner and Chuck Marsh for a learning lab/library coordinator at the fledgling technical institute. They sounded like people Phil would like, so he stopped by the office to pick up an application.*

*While he was there, he met Bruce and Chuck and liked them immediately.*

*"I was impressed with them. We talked and they offered me the job on the spot," Phil said.*

*"The story went around that I got hired wearing shorts and flip-flops, but that's not true," Phil said, laughing. "I was wearing shorts and red, white and blue shoes."*

## *Negotiating behind the scenes*



in the best interest of the students, Phil said.

“Five specialty programs – pottery, gunsmithing, taxidermy, metal engraving and forestry – gave us the opportunity to make ourselves known,” Phil said. “We were not in competition with other schools. We just worked hard to maintain good relationships with national and state agencies, county officials, and any and all approving agencies. Often we really had to be persuasive to get them to let us try new ideas, but a lot of those proposals have now become standard for the system. There was never a problem with the many audits from all these agencies standard for the system. There was never a problem with the many audits from all these agencies

“We were small, so we had to do everything right. There was no room for error,” Phil said.

A college community becomes a work family and that was even more true at MCC as the college struggled with enrollment, cuts in funding and occasional moves by the state board to make MCC a satellite of one and then another county’s community college.

MCC employees stood firm behind the boards of trustees and administrators to keep the college intact.

“We had nurtured this college throughout its life, and we knew its value to the community and knew we had to protect what so many had worked so hard to build,” he said. “We cared about people and they cared about the college.”

*Phil said Bruce Turner, who served twice as interim president during his career, was a behind the scenes force who made more contacts and did more for the college than anyone would ever know.*

*“And he doesn’t want you to know,” Phil added, “but we learned from Bruce.”*

*Phil, along with then vice-president Bill Price and Talbert Myers, vice-president of continuing education/community, services were at a SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) meeting in Atlanta. They had met with the SACS vice-president of curriculum, seeking college transfer credit for one-year courses. The rule was a college had to have two-year courses. During a really long and boring business session, the four slipped out a back door for a break which gave the MCC trio a platform to informally explain their small college situation.*

*“He (SACS vp) understood our need and said he would support our request,” Phil said. “And that’s how we negotiated the one-year college transfer agreement.”*

# Pat Mashburn

## Staff

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Patricia (Pat) Mashburn Brady is still remembered by her colleagues at Montgomery Technical Institute for her incredible memory and insight into the success of programs and individuals. "She was the first and best secretary I ever had," recalls Chuck Marsh, one of the first administrators recruited for his expertise in adult education. "She was so fast, so accurate and had a phone book in her head."

Pat laughs at that nearly 50-year memory. "If I ever called a phone number once, I never forgot it. It was just something I could do, and Chuck always marveled at it," she said. "He's the one who bought an offset press that Jane Hancock and I had to learn to operate to print everything the college needed printing." Pat and Jane Hancock were the two very first clerical employees. "I was working as a temp for Judge David Harris at his law firm and he recommended me to the technical institute that was just getting started," Pat said. "I went to work in June 1968. Everybody worked in one room, except President David Bland, who had a small office. We just worked around each other." Even in that environment, Pat recalls that Mr. Bland was always upbeat and personable, a real people person. When Marvin Miles became president, Pat said he was all business. "He was a serious person and not much for small talk," she said. "The foundations had been laid for a lot of new programs and he was dedicated to implementing them." Pat recalls "working around" Marsh, Bruce Turner, Ron Kincaid, Charles Kendall and Ellen Turner, who were business instructors, and Decatur Jones, human resources director, and Virginia Jones, business manager. And, around that offset press.

"Chuck gave us (Pat and Jane) information for fliers, brochures, program descriptions and whatever else they needed more than a couple of copies. We designed and wrote and printed. We got really good at it, too, including three-color brochures," Pat said.

The first three programs offered were business administration, secretarial science and industrial maintenance. "Everybody worked together on deciding what to teach, where to have classes and program description. Chuck and the others wrote the curricula. Instructors had input on their classes," Pat said. "We had no guidelines to go by, but we were a team determined to offer our students the best instruction possible."

The staff was so small that Bob Bell, who taught business administration, invited them all to lunch at his house one day. Pat also remembers some of those early students - Harold Van Derveer, Cherry Caudle, Meg Sinclair, Elma Miller, who later worked in the business office, and John McIntyre, the second SGA president and who helped write their first constitution.

Pat said the first year's classes had only half a dozen or more students. They sold textbooks out of a supply cabinet. Peggy Brewer was hired and took over the "bookstore" along with other duties. As the school grew, Peggy became bookstore manager of a real store until she retired.

Shirley Jenkins wrote and taught the nursing program in 1968. Pat's sister, Gail Davis was in the second class. "When Shirley slipped and fell at the Christmas party and broke both wrists, I signed papers for her for six weeks, always with an explanation why I signed her name," Pat said.

Chuck Marsh moved to head of vocational classes and Bruce Turner became director of continuing education. Pat was secretary to continuing education for over eight years. Bruce Turner was wonderful. I really like him and Ellen and admired how they made friends with everybody.

Pat was moved to Student Services when Phil Kissell was director and she was Veterans Affairs Representative, a position that has been most meaningful to everyone who has held it. In 1975, MTI was the first community college in the state to offer EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) certification.

"The instructor was Kathryn Crouch. Faye Miller from Biscoe and I were the only women in the class of 12-15 men," Pat said. "MTI was training most of the EMTs in the state, but pretty soon it was taught all over the state. I also remember Bob Qualls teaching Basic Law Enforcement Training, which was also among the first in the state."

Barney Green, who retired as purchasing agent at MCC, was Pat's friend since childhood. "Everybody loved Barney. He always helped wherever he could. He met his future wife, Margaret, when she was a nursing student and she was as sweet and kind as Barney," Pat said.

Pat, along with all the other employees, helped move into MCC's first home on the new campus on Page Street. To keep an administrator on site for night students, each department took turns working second shift one day a week. By then, Pat had married and her only child, Jolee, who came to work with mom after day care

*I was a reporter at Montgomery Herald when Pat was proofreader, copy editor and page designer, and, our go-to-person when we got computers in the newsroom. That's newspaper talk for "you do a lot of jobs."*

*Pat made the advertisers look good when she redid their ads to be clear, informative and have correct grammar and punctuation. She wouldn't change a word without their approval. Pat's career had been mostly with numbers and statistics, but she was also a stickler when it came to grammar and punctuation. She wouldn't touch a reporter's story, but when Pat marked a misspelled word or an incorrect verb tense or punctuation or an awkward sentence, we didn't question her. We thanked her and changed it. She would be right. For the next 20-plus years when I made an error and it got printed, I would think, "Pat would have caught that."* - Mary Anderson

for a few hours. Pat worked in the reception area on those nights and Jolee was such a joy; she was a magnet for everyone in the building to come by and help spoil her.

Jolee is now a critical care nurse at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital and the mother of Pat's two grandchildren, an 18-year-old grandson and a five-year-old granddaughter. When the pottery department got its own building, Pat remembers a time when she, Kathy Harris, Janno Daniel, history instructor Jim Ray and several rotating students would have a weekly potluck lunch in the building.

"Everybody loved Jim Ray. He always had a joke and was so much fun to talk with," Pat said. "MTI was always like a family where we worked together and supported each other."

When computers became available as the new business tool, Pat and Ann Tarleton went to Raleigh for several weeks for training and then taught MCC personnel. When Jolee was in elementary school, Pat was offered a job as registrar at Piedmont Community College and left MTI after 17 years.

"I went to Piedmont for more money and I liked the president, but I didn't like living in Roxboro. I came from a big family in Montgomery County and we didn't have that close family fellowship there. We stayed only a couple of years," Pat said.

Pat grew up in Star, where many of her relatives still live, graduated from East Montgomery High School and Asheboro Commercial College. She had earned her associate degree in business administration at MTI and her bachelor's degree in business management from Gardner-Webb University.

When Pat moved back home, she worked at Montgomery Herald for seven years as proofreader, copy editor and page designer. In 1990, Pat was appointed to the MCC Board of Trustees and served for one term. She asked not to be reappointed because of family issues at the time.

Then she accepted a job as accountant at Citation Corp. in Biscoe and worked there for 10 years. "Then in 2009, I officially retired!" Pat said. After overcoming some serious health issues, Pat now stays busy with family. She is an active volunteer at the Troy Senior Center in group activities and keeping the library organized. She also enjoys reading and gardening.

*Congratulations on 50 Years,  
Montgomery Community College!*



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# Peggy Brewer & Anne Tarlton

## Staff



**Peggy Brewer**

Peggy Brewer began working at Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) in August 1969. She was Peggy McMillan back then. She was hired by Ron Kincaid to work in the business office, but most people associate Peggy with the bookstore, which she ran for 29 years.

Peggy wanted to be a nurse but was always better at her business classes in school. When she didn't pass her nursing exam she instead went to work as a shipping clerk and took classes at Arnold's Business College in Albemarle.

"I took accounting and business courses," Peggy said. "I would get home around 5 p.m. from work in Asheboro, eat supper, and take off for Albemarle two nights a week."

Later her job was eliminated when her employer sold out to a new company, and Peggy applied at MTI for a business office position.

"I had to take a typing test, typing figures on a six-to-eight column form with single lines using an IBM electric typewriter with the little ball that moved from one side to the other. This was modern technology because I was used to using a typewriter with the individual letters and the carriage you had to return manually," Peggy said. "I must have done O.K because I got the job."

Peggy worked with Virginia Jones who was MTI's bookkeeper at the time. Her job was to type budget reports that had to be sent to the Department of Community Colleges office in Raleigh.

Peggy's career with MTI's bookstore had humble beginnings in the old Board of Education building on Page Street. She would only order books for the classes that were scheduled. The books were kept in a room that was used as a print shop.

"We sold the books to the students there," Peggy said. As the number of classes grew, she was able to purchase a couple of two-door metal cabinets to store the books in. "We even purchased pencils and notebooks for sale," Peggy said. And so, the MTI Bookstore was born.

In 1977 the bookstore moved to a much larger space in the newly-constructed building.

"When I saw the new bookstore I thought, 'I'll never be able to fill this place up,'" Peggy said. "It wasn't long before it was getting too small." Once stocked, the bookstore looked more like a wilderness supply depot. "We had taxidermy deer head forms on the walls, all types of animal forms and eyeballs, basket weaving supplies, tools for making pottery, gunsmithing supplies and of course general classroom supplies," she said.

All monies were received in the bookstore because it was part of the business office. At the time of registration students paid their tuition in the bookstore and books weren't sold until after registration.

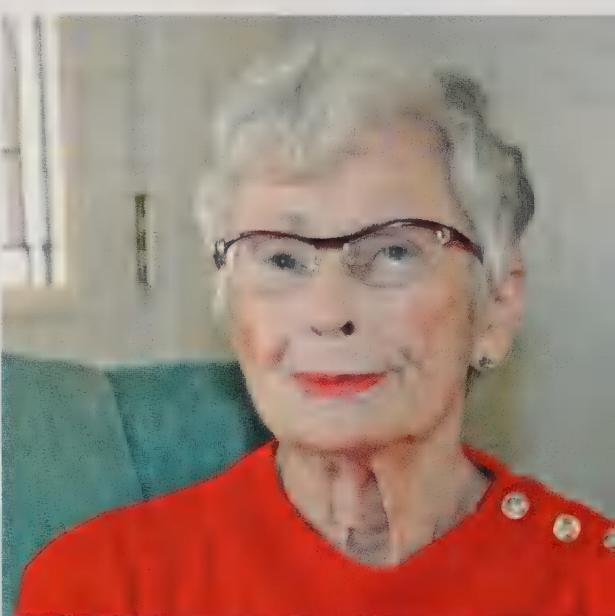
In 1995, the business office built a cashier's window and tuition receipts were handled there. The bookstore was purchased by an outside company, College Bookstores of America. Peggy continued to work for them until February 1998 when she retired.

One year after the college began operating in its new building, a young woman by the name of Anne Tarlton was hired as an assistant bookkeeper in the business office. Anne dropped out of high school and married at age 17. After her children were grown she was at loose ends, wanting to do something with her life.

Anne finished high school through a correspondence course – that's distance learning without the computer. She worked several years in hosiery mills doing bookkeeping and secretarial work before deciding to go to back to school to get her associate's degree in business administration. She began working for MTI during this time. After completing her degree in 1979, she went on to earn a second associate degree, this time in accounting. Anne saw her education as a way to advance in her job, so when Gardner-Webb University began offering classes on MTI's campus, she went back to school and earned her Bachelor of Science degree in business administration. She graduated magna cum laude in 1985.

"It just goes to show what you can do if you want to," Anne said. Because of her education, Anne would become the college's first computer systems administrator.

Anne and Peggy worked together for Ed Jenkins in the business office at MTI and became quick friends. Peggy remembers the first automated accounting system the college purchased.



**Anne Tarlton**



"It was really a huge typewriter," Peggy said. "The salesman came to teach us how to use it and the next day was payday. Virginia Jones had the payroll all figured up and gave it to me to type into the huge machine. So I sat down and started to work. About the third or fourth check it started typing all by itself and messed up the check it was typing. Of course, it was my check and it was for several thousand dollars. I didn't get to keep it," she said.

When the school moved to the new campus, the huge machine moved too, and it was used for several years afterwards. Anne also remembers the huge machine.

"There were no computers when I first started working at MTI," Anne said. "The only thing we had was an accounting machine which was the nearest thing to an automated system. You had to do all the prep work on paper and type it into the machine which posted to a ledger. It had a long carriage and made a lot of noise," she said.

Then in 1982 the college acquired its first small mainframe computer. "It automatically calculated quarterly reports which saved a lot of time," Anne said. The first computer applications were used in continuing education and student services and were mostly student databases. By this time, Anne had taken several continuing education classes in computer analysis, logic, etc., trying to learn as much as she could about computers. "I didn't go anywhere without a book in my hand," Anne said.

During the early years, the employees who used the computers at the college knew very little about how they worked other than how to operate

them. Anne tells a story about how she was very conscientious about turning computers off during rough weather. One such afternoon she sent a message through the network to all the computer stations telling employees to shut the computers down because a storm was approaching.

"Virginia Gentry was working in Student Services at the time," Anne said. "When the message I sent came across her computer screen she exclaimed, 'Look at that! This thing is so smart it knows a storm is coming!'"

In 1985, the Department of Community Colleges went on a single computerized system which incorporated student and financial databases. The system in Raleigh was connected to every community college in the state via fiber optic telephone lines. Anne traveled to Raleigh weekly to learn how to operate the new system. She was still attending Gardner-Webb at the time and would come back from Raleigh and go to school from 4 – 10 PM twice a week. "Plus, I had my regular job to do," Anne said.

"Every time we added a new application, I went to train in Raleigh. I remember when my husband was recovering from bypass surgery and it was pouring down rain. I didn't think I was going to make it. I would leave the house at 6 a.m. and not get home until 10 p.m. It taught me that anybody can do anything if they're willing to work for it and do what it takes," Anne said.

One of Anne's and Peggy's most difficult memories of their time at MTI occurred when Mary Gaffney, secretary to Bruce Turner in continuing education, suffered a fatal heart attack in her office while at work.

"The nursing instructors did CPR but couldn't help her," Anne said. "It was a real tragedy. We were all very close. Everyone felt her loss."

Mary's memory lived on in an event the employees held before the Christmas break each year. Peggy invited employees to play Secret Santa in the weeks between Thanksgiving and the end of the fall term. Before the term ended, the participants would have a covered dish luncheon and reveal their identities to each other. Peggy, who is an accomplished artist, would craft angels for each participant in Mary Gaffney's memory. Over the years she crafted dozens of different angels of varying shapes and sizes for MCC employees.

Peggy continues to attend the Multimedia Art classes at MCC under instructor, Joe Grebner. The Multimedia Art class is the longest continuously running class in the history of the college. Peggy produces water color paintings and crafts for many charitable organizations and causes. Peggy and Anne remain friends and meet for lunch every other month with other MCC retirees.



# Ron Kincaid

## Staff



One of the early movers and shakers at Montgomery Technical Institute was John Ronald "Ron" Kincaid, who was hired as an Administrative Assistant to MTI's first President, David Bland, in July 1968. His job was to "assist the President in any and all matters pertaining to the total operation of the institute." Although that might seem to be an unusually broad job description, it accurately describes what most MTI employees did during the college's formative years.

"Anything that needed to be done, we would do it," Kincaid said. "We were like a battalion – a group of Marines. It didn't matter what department you were in. If you needed help, we were there."

President Bland was also impressed with the "get it done" attitude that MTI employees displayed, including Kincaid, as the school was getting started.

"There was such a dedication on the part of the staff to make the school a reality. Ron Kincaid was my right hand and did everything in the world to keep things together and did a marvelous job," Bland said.

Kincaid had been in education for eight years but got out of it to sell insurance. He had territories all across the state and did a lot of traveling. Later, he decided he wanted to get back into education. He was in Raleigh on business one day when he stopped in to speak to I.E. Ready, who was the first President of the N.C. Community College System.

"I didn't even know him, but I decided to go to the top and find out what was available. He told me there was a school starting in Troy and that I should talk to them," Kincaid said.

Kincaid was familiar with Troy as it was one of his territories, and that same day he drove down to talk to David Bland.

"I don't sit around," Kincaid said. It was a Friday when he asked about a job at MTI. "I had a good talk with David, but there was nothing available at the time," he said.

The following Monday Kincaid got a call from MTI. The person who was originally hired for an administrative position said he would rather teach. Kincaid was offered the position which he accepted, and he was hired as Administrative Assistant to the President. Kincaid handled the business, financial and personnel matters of the institute, as well as public relations. At the time however, everyone in the college did public relations.

"Bruce Turner, Chuck Marsh and myself, anyplace we were allowed, we went. We visited every industry in the county. We went to all the town meetings. We met with every civic organization. We got out into the community. We developed relationships with all of them," Kincaid said.

They didn't just meet with these organizations, they also joined them. Kincaid joined the Lion's Club, was instrumental in starting Dixie Youth Baseball in N.C., and was involved in the American and the North Carolina Vocational Associations.

Kincaid had fond memories of the many people he worked with. Lenue T. "Nudy" James was the editor of the Montgomery Herald. "He was a big supporter of MTI. I talked with him and we had articles in the paper every week. We had an old Polaroid camera and I took pictures of everything," Kincaid said.

Kincaid remembers going to a conference with MTI's custodian, George Simmons. "He was more professional than most of us. You didn't have to ask him to do anything. He just did it," Kincaid said. He also remembers the people who worked in the various offices. "Pat [Mashburn] Brady (Continuing Education), Jane Hancock (Student Services), Shirley Lowery (MTI receptionist), whatever needed to be done, they did it. They were unbelievable. Pat Brady could remember telephone numbers forever. She didn't need a phone book," Kincaid said. "It was a tight group. I never doubted anyone would ever do anything I asked them to do. It didn't matter if I needed someone to get an article together or to go to a meeting for me, they would do it. We were a team."

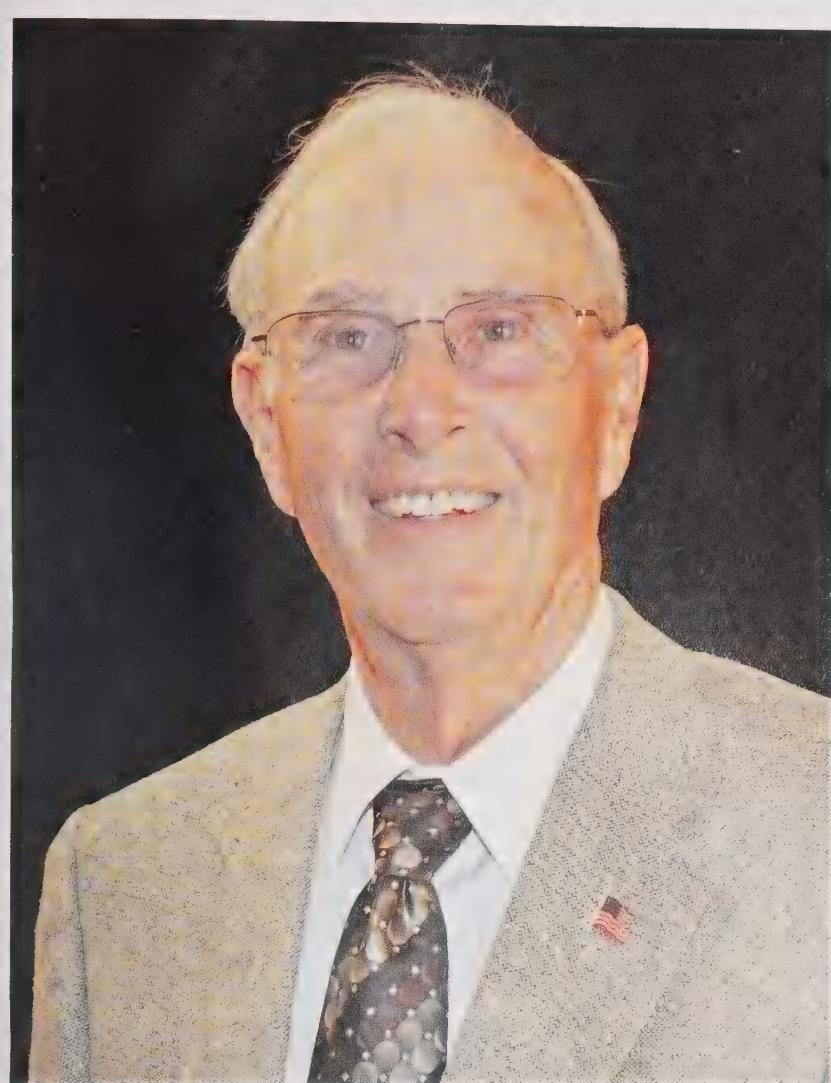
The closely-knit group of employees also regularly socialized together. Kincaid recalls a pig pickin' that MTI's Continuing Education Director, Chuck Marsh, hosted at his home.

"A group of us went the night before to cook the pig at Chuck's house. We stayed all night cooking it. While it was cooking we went to the movie at the Gilmont Theater in Mount Gilead. It was the last movie that played there because later it burned down," Kincaid said.

Kincaid recalls the budget always being tight during those early years. "Our budget was about \$18-\$20K. The rest we went around and raised. Our instructors and students did the work on the buildings. At Page Street we didn't have a library, so we asked the county to close in the porch and we'd finish it ourselves, and that would be the library. We did wiring and painting at night and on weekends. Everyone pitched in," Kincaid said.

Kincaid left MTI in 1971 for a position as business manager of the Gaston County school system but continued to live in Montgomery County. After two years he decided to take a job at Jordan Lumber Company where he worked until he retired. Now Kincaid serves on the Board of Trustees at Montgomery Community College. Looking back on his time at MTI, he is amazed at how far the college has come in 50 years.

"It has been a great experience to have worked at MTI. People want to do good things. If something is worthwhile, if you are committed and really believe in it and you can communicate it, people will join and you'll get it done. It's our community and our school and who doesn't want something good that's theirs?" Kincaid said.



*“A group of us went the night before to cook the pig at Chuck’s house. We stayed all night cooking it. While it was cooking we went to the movie at the Gilmont Theater in Mount Gilead. It was the last movie that played there because later it burned down,”*

*Kincaid said.*

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# Talbert Myers

## Staff

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When Talbert Myers went to work at Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) in 1981, it was a homecoming for him and his wife, Gail. Both were born and raised in Montgomery County. Talbert graduated from West Montgomery High School in 1968 and Gail in 1972. He graduated from N.C. Central University and Gail earned her bachelor's degree in Religion and Philosophy from Shaw University.

After earning his undergraduate degree in Biology and his master's degree in microbiology, Talbert worked at UNC Chapel Hill and then joined a research project to study Brown Lung Disease at N.C. State University. When the grant was nearing its end, researchers began putting out feelers for jobs. Talbert heard that MTI was looking for a math and science teacher and applied. "The Lord blessed us to come home," Talbert said in a telephone interview. "Gail and I had married in 1974 and our children were ages 5 and 3. We were living in Durham with no family nearby except one cousin. We wanted our children to grow up knowing their grandparents and extended family. After an interview with Ted Blake, he recommended me to President Marvin Miles." Janno Daniel was hired to teach math and Talbert was hired to teach biology. "Of course, everyone who worked there had other duties. I also worked in the Learning Lab with Jack Crawford, teaching the Human Resources Development (HRD) classes," Talbert said. "The people at MTI were so helpful. They would do anything they could for each other and for the students," Talbert said. "Throughout my time at MCC, I was fortunate to have mentors like Bruce Turner and Ted Blake and friends like Phil Kissell, Dale McGinnis, Margo Gaddy and Willie Chambers. In the mid 1980s, there was a state initiative focused on adult literacy. Each college was funded to employ a staff person to oversee those programs. "I was fortunate to be hired for that position and Bruce Turner became my supervisor," Talbert said. "It was then that I really became an advocate for adult education as I became the Director of Basic Skills and Special Programs, which included

HRD. Felicia Knight (Hill) worked as my secretary for a number of years. Donna Smith and Harvest Little both worked with the HRD program and both were assets to the program."

"It was so rewarding to see people work through their insecurities and work so hard to learn, and then be so proud of what they had accomplished. They were smart and talented people. Most of the illiteracy was lack of opportunity," Talbert said. "We had some outstanding teachers, too. Novella Turner, Linnie Comer, Sarah Ledwell, Lillian Robinson - I learned from every one of them. They, and everybody who worked at MTI, was always willing to go the extra mile." Other outstanding teachers were Hattie Stanback, Marlene Pratt, Rev. Harold Auler and Lois Callicutt. Lois taught Compensatory Education classes in Biscoe. Hattie was an ABE teacher and Rev. Auler and his wife really helped to get our English as a Second Language (ESL) program off the ground.

Talbert said MTI was, and MCC still is, a focal point for Montgomery County. "The college has provided opportunities for people to begin to learn and grow, to do things they would not have even started if the college hadn't opened the door to the possibility," he said. When Dr. Benny Hampton resigned in 1992, Bruce Turner became interim president and Talbert became interim dean of Continuing Education. Mary Morris Gaffney, longtime secretary to the Continuing Education department, had passed away suddenly and Wanda Jackson had taken her position. "Everybody loved Mary and her passing affected us all. She was a hard act to follow, but Wanda came in and did an outstanding job," Talbert said. "Pat McPherson, who headed Continuing Education after I left, was a teacher at the time. Felicia Cook joined the Continuing Education team as a second secretary and she really did a great job." Talbert and Wanda worked together for several years, until she completed her bachelor's degree and became an instructor in the business management program. Carolyn Hager became secretary to Continuing Education. "Carolyn came in and was a real pro.

*"One year," Talbert said, laughing. "One of the taxidermy instructors brought in a roast possum. Some people tasted it, I think, but most of us couldn't get past the apple in its mouth."*

When the CNA program really started to grow, Carolyn helped me out so much especially with the pinning ceremonies. Rebecca Dickerson joined us as a secretary after Felicia Cook left to focus on furthering her education. There were others, many others like Donna Beverly, Vickie Barber, Michelle Boyd, Charles Smith, Jim Ray, Ronnie Glover and Wayne Bernauer." Talbert said other people who helped out so much were Barney Green (purchasing agent) our go-to guy for all our office supply needs as well as Grady Goforth, who ran the print shop, and made sure we got our program brochures and other printed materials. "There were so many great people who meant so much to me at MCC over the years, and all their names escape right now. You know, as you age the memory doesn't work as well as it once did," Talbert said. Everybody at MTI worked hard, "but I remember people having fun, too." It meant a lot to Continuing Education students to be included in the Student Government Association's annual Spring Fling. It brought students of all ages from all walks of life together.

Before every Christmas break, faculty and staff would have a potluck lunch. "One year," Talbert said, laughing, "One of the taxidermy instructors brought in a roast possum. Some people tasted it, I think, but most of us couldn't get past the apple in its mouth." Continuing Education has many night classes, most of them off campus. One of the duties of the director is to visit every class. "What we did was hard work, but we enjoyed our work. It was meaningful and it was rewarding," Talbert said. Talbert's status as interim dean became permanent in 1992 and the title was changed to vice-president in 1997. Continuing Education continued to grow rapidly, especially in firefighter training, emergency medical personnel and law enforcement. "One of the best moves MTI ever made was to bring Joe Huntley (Troy fire chief) into the firefighter program. He was, and still is, one of the best and the most respected men in the profession. He brought so much to the program. The same is true for Randy Kearns in the paramedics program. We were training people from all over state." Bob Qualls had taken over the Basic Law Enforcement Training and graduating police officers for statewide service. The Practical Nursing program was a curriculum success from the beginning and there was interest in a Certified Nursing Assistant program, which was taught in the Continuing Education Department. Vickie Barber was the first CNA instructor and when she left, Carol Lamonds became instructor and coordinator. Rhonda Kearns joined the faculty. "The CNA program grew and we added CNA -2, taught by Mary Perez. We kept training CNAs and the jobs were there for them," Talbert said. While Talbert was leading the growth of his department at MTI, his wife, Gail, had found her place in the community with her career and volunteer work. She had opened a daycare center in Mt. Gilcad, was In-School Suspension teacher at Highland Middle School and had become executive director of the Troy Housing Authority (THA). Under her leadership, the THA had renovated the vacant Troy Middle School into apartments for the elderly and established the Peabody Museum in the original Peabody High School. In 1999, Talbert accepted an administrative position at Johnston Community College. He completed his doctorate degree in higher education administration at N.C. State University and Gail, who had always felt a calling to the ministry, got her master's degree from Duke University Divinity School. Talbert is retired now and works with the food pantry at Showers of Blessings Community Church, where Gail is the pastor, near Clayton.

They also enjoy their two grandchildren, ages 6 and 3. "I appreciate the opportunity I had to be a part of MCC. That's where I learned from

Bruce Turner the management style that worked so well as I supervised more and more personnel," Talbert said. "He taught me to be sure that the employee knows what the expectations are, give them the resources to do the job, then leave them alone to do the job. I respected Bruce and emulated him throughout my career."



**Gail and Talbert Myers**

# Ted Blake

## Staff

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“Near the end of the school year in 1971, Mr. Miles called me to his office and told me that there was a relatively new technical institute in Troy. He said he had accepted the job as president and he wanted me to go with him. I wasn’t real sure what a technical institute was,” Ted said, “but I was somewhat familiar with Troy. My parents were from Montgomery County and we visited my grandparents there when I was a kid.”

Ted Blake was assistant principal and basketball coach at Thomasville High School. Marvin Miles was principal. The two were close friends. Miles had become a father-figure to Blake, who had lost his own father at age 12.

Ted had come back to Davidson County as an educator after he graduated from Ledford High School and Pfeiffer University, where he attended on a basketball scholarship and was team captain. He would later be named to the Davidson County Sports Hall of Fame. Later, he would earn his master’s degree in higher education administration from Appalachian State University.

“I still love basketball, but I was ready to put playing and coaching behind me and focus on education, particularly vocational education,” he said.

In July 1971, they came to Troy and led MTI (Montgomery Technical Institute) through a dozen years through construction of its first permanent building, adding new programs and rapidly increasing enrollment.

Their first graduation in August that year had about 25 graduates. MTI had a good practical nurse program established, and industrial maintenance and business administration had some graduates. Miles and Blake had come from a high school with over 1,200 students. “Mr. Miles was vocational-education oriented. He and the mission of a technical institute, to teach and train people for jobs, fit hand in glove,” Blake said. “I shared his vision of what MTI could become.”

### **Blake was director of occupational education.**

“My struggle was to come to an understanding of where we were, what were we doing, where we needed to be and how to get there. There was no lightning bolt of revelation. It was a slow and gradual process. The first thing I learned was what I didn’t know about adult education.” He learned a lot from Bruce Turner, who had been recruited to MTI for his experience and expertise in adult education. Blake said the reality he learned at MTI was that time and place didn’t matter - instruction and students did matter. Turner had set up classes in small communities all over the county, wherever there was an interest in any subject or craft.

As they visited continuing education classes, Turner took Blake to Charlie Singleton’s backyard class where they were learning the old craft of weaving split oak baskets from the oak splits they had cut from a log in the backyard. Blake saw classes in community buildings, church basements, store fronts and a tobacco barn. “I saw that a perfect environment in the beginning is not necessary. You can have school anywhere. All you need is those who want to learn and someone to teach,” he said. Taking that thinking forward, MTI created a way for criminal justice students to get a degree by offering identical day and evening classes. This was necessary because the students’ shifts changed and they couldn’t attend a schedule with locked in class times. This was also done for an accounting degree. It had never been done before. “The only way it happened was because of the dedication of the instructors,” he said. Most instructors taught day and night classes Monday through Thursday. (That changed about in the mid-1980s when the community college system started emphasizing college transfer programs.

“As a small institution, MTI needed to think differently from the technical colleges in places with larger populations and more resources. Everything had to be done right. The programs had to be right, and when it was done right, you had to let it grow, and they did grow. “There was always a struggle to get what we needed. There will always be limits and you have to wait. We had our frustrations, but we all kept working together. We all had the same goal,” Blake said. “Whatever we did, we did well.”

MTI had been chartered in 1967 by the N.C. State Board of Education. With a strong and dedicated board of trustees, those first five years had been spent in organizing a technical institute, deciding what to teach, setting up classes and hiring a core administrative staff, most of whom stayed on until retirement and after.

In 1971, it was time to grow and time to find the school a permanent home. Vocational training classes were held in makeshift shops in an old automobile dealership; and other classes, especially continuing education, were held in unlikely nooks and crannies, like the tobacco barn, all over the county.

“That had served a good purpose. It introduced the county residents to MTI, let them know the school was responsive to whatever they wanted to learn and would meet their needs,” Blake said. “Everyone became interested under an umbrella of collective ownership. It was the county’s school and we were there to teach and train.”

A home for MTI came through a generous gesture from Col. Reese Blair, retired U.S. Army scientist and native of Troy. Dr. Blair offered the college over 150 acres of land on Page Street for a campus. The first hurdle was to get the money to build a campus. The county launched a bond referendum in 1974.

Blake recalled the odds against them. “We were in a recession with textile mills closing and the vote was held on a Saturday. MTI employees rallied and campaigned for the college. “Among others, I remember Sarah Carpenter was instrumental in getting out the vote. She was a strong advocate and believed in what we were doing,” he said. “Lo and behold, the referendum passed by 61 votes. It was the only education bond passed in North Carolina that year.” Carpenter was an early student at MTI, graduated, and later worked in the library and Learning Resource Center.

Building plans went through several revisions to keep the emphasis on vocational spaces, and construction was approved by the trustees in 1976. Trustee John Kern, who was a contractor, oversaw construction and employees were almost daily visitors to check on progress. “I remember walking through the building with Turner and wondering how we would ever fill that much space. In two years, I was wondering where we were going to put all these students,” he said. “We had added auto mechanics, air conditioning, auto body repair, early childhood education, criminal justice and the EMT certificate program graduated its first class in 1975.”

Blake and Miles shared the same philosophy as the board on finding the right people for the job. Work hard in the hiring process, find the right person, then step aside and let them do their job. “We had a building full of good people who got along and worked together. Nobody blinked when

an administrator walked down the hall or came into a classroom. There was never that 'here's the boss reaction - everybody look busy' attitude," Blake laughed. "They were more likely to say, 'hey, come in here, we got a problem'."

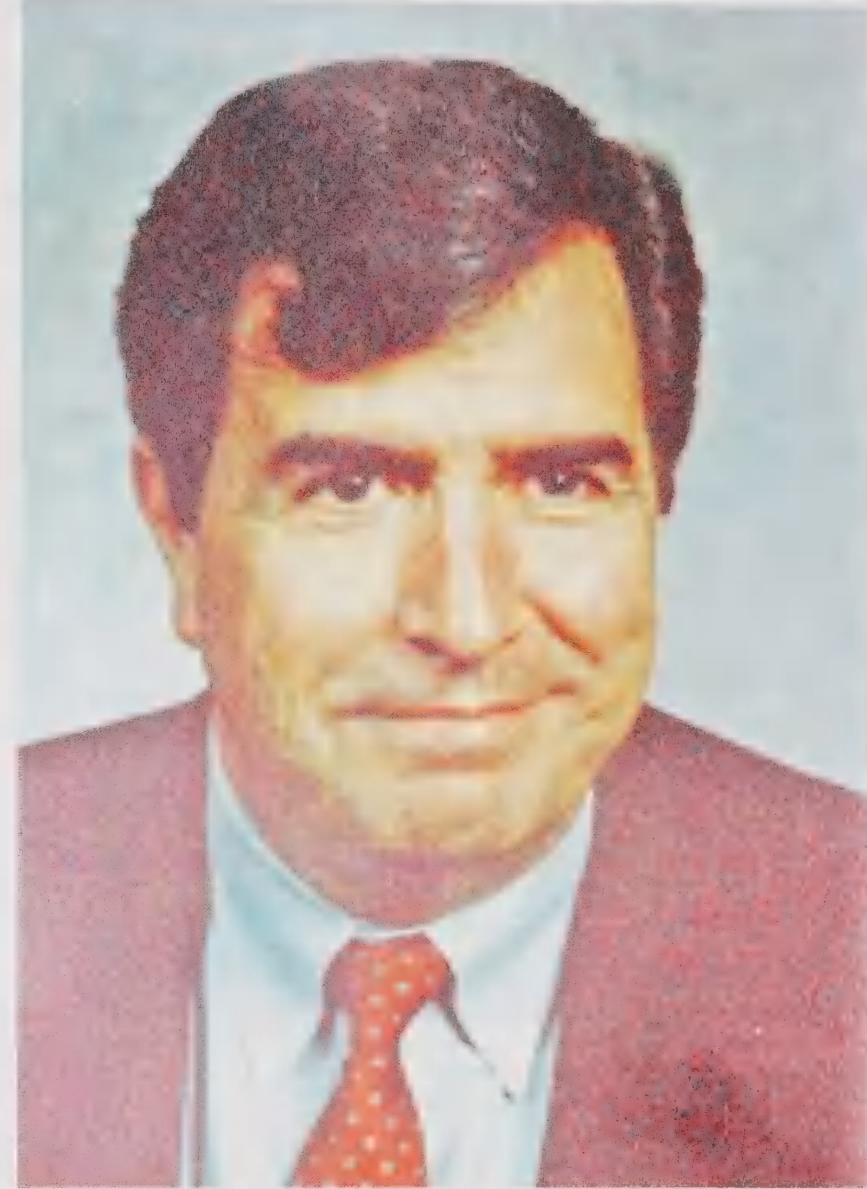
Blake looked forward to early morning coffee and conversations on the back hall where vocational students gathered before class.

MTI was a wonderfully unique place, he said. "Was it the people or the programs? Neither and both. There was never a worry about people doing their jobs and doing them well." Blake valued the positive relationships he still has with students and employees, notably Doris Haywood, his and Miles' secretary.

"She is a genuinely good person and I still enjoy seeing her." One of the most daring moves MTI made under Miles and Blake was to start a gunsmithing program in 1978. Turner was the first to mention gunsmithing and led the slow process of building support among professional gunmakers and firearms organizations. The class was several years in the making, starting with a continuing education class on black powder rifles. The momentum grew. Blake took the application to the president of the community college system, Larry Blake (no relation), who had grown up in the Pacific Northwest and didn't have the typical "guns on campus" fears. Larry Blake saw the preparation that had gone into the application and agreed that the second gunsmithing school east of the Mississippi was a good idea and recommended approval. Other opposition was quietly confronted and overcome by Turner and the gunsmithing advisory committee. Three factors made the gunsmithing program a reality, Blake said. "I listened to Bruce Turner, got approval from the state and hired Gene Anderson." Blake said he had no clue in the world where to find an instructor. "Doris (Haywood) suggested talking to her brother, Jack McIntyre, who had been to Pennsylvania Gunsmith School.

McIntyre recommended Gene Anderson. "It took some convincing to get Gene to move here and start our school, but like everything good, the program started small and grew. Now, it is one of the top schools in the country and has brought national attention to MCC. "Thanks to Mike Ferree, we had gained national attention for pottery. Our innovative programs made us stand out among community colleges. We had done the groundwork for taxidermy and metal engraving, which were started in 1984." Equipment for community college programs is expensive. Instructors counted on Purchasing Agent Barney Green to be alert to finding things they needed in state surplus or anywhere and counted on Blake to do whatever could be done to get what they needed. Blake had his pilot's license and had flown Ferree to places to find equipment for the pottery program. MTI learned of a Department of Defense (DoD) program which loaned surplus machine shop equipment to colleges until such time as the military might need it. Usually never, but those were the terms. Anderson said Blake rented or borrowed a plane on several occasions to take him, Green and another instructor on equipment finding missions. The DoD warehouses were in Mechanicsburg, Pa., and they were able to get some milling machines delivered to MTI. "Ted knew what we needed and always did whatever he could to get it for us," Anderson said. Blake had to be asked about his tireless hunt for equipment. "That was my job," he said simply. Blake laughs as he tells the story of one instructor who had never been in an airplane. "I won't embarrass him by naming him, but his entire flying experience consists of taking off, circling the airport and landing to let him off." Blake looks at adult education and community colleges as invaluable to their communities. "There is no way to place a value on these institutions. The real value is for each individual who takes advantage of the opportunity to gain knowledge, learn skills and get better jobs. Something in their lives becomes better because they were there."

"It would be hard to find a family in Montgomery County that has not been touched by the college," he said. After he left MTI when Miles retired, Blake worked a few years at another community college, then went back into the public school system as principal at Asheboro High School. It was there he initiated block scheduling, which had worked so well at MTI and fits every curriculum, especially vocational classes. That led to his becoming the national consultant for revamping high school schedules across the United States. The block scheduling concept came from a reality he learned from the innovative thinking at MTI: You don't have to do things the way they have always been done. He has also served on the MCC Board of Trustees and on the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners and is currently chairman of the board of directors for the Troy Housing Authority.



**Happy 50th Anniversary  
from the Town of Biscoe!**

# Wanda Jackson

## Staff



Wanda Jackson started her career at Montgomery Technical Institute in 1989 as secretary to the Student Services Dept. and retired in 2014 as the head of the Office Administration:Legal Program. Wanda had graduated from East Montgomery High School and Asheboro Commercial College with a one-year certificate.

"I had so much encouragement from co-workers and supervisors to continue my education. Employees could take one course each quarter free, so I got my AA degree from MTI. Keep going, they said, so I got my degree in business administration from Gardner-Webb University," Wanda said.

"Everybody except Wanda could see her potential," said Bruce Turner. "I knew that as she advanced, Continuing Ed was going to lose a good secretary, but I also knew that she would be an excellent teacher." Wanda's first job at MTI was in the Student Services Dept. where she was a counselor to financial aid students, recruiter and answered the switchboard. "Phil Kissell (director) was so good and taught me so much. I had never worked in education, but I learned that everything is meticulous. Phil proofread every word to be sure that grammar and punctuation were correct before anything went out to the public." Before MTI, she had worked at Montgomery Motors in the business office. Computers were coming into use in every business and MTI was training students for jobs where computers had replaced a dozen office machines. "MTI made sure we had good training and we saw the advantages in computers," Wanda said. After the unexpected death of Continuing Education secretary Mary Gaffney, Bruce asked Wanda to apply for the job. "This was a whole new side of adult education," Wanda said, "but again, everyone was so helpful, especially Ann Tarleton and Bruce was still encouraging me to get my bachelor's degree." Continuing Education was something new and different every day, Wanda learned. Programs were growing. "I crossed paths with such a cross-

section of Montgomery County people taking classes in emergency services, fire training, air conditioning and in NRA (National Rifle Association) sanctioned classes, as well as those in the traditional arts and crafts and basic education," Wanda said. Another new experience was when North Carolina required CDLs (commercial drivers license) for every truck driver. "This was traumatic for drivers whose jobs their whole lives were driving a truck. Some of the loggers, agricultural and local business drivers couldn't read and write. Fortunately, there was an oral exam for them," Wanda said. "We would see them sitting in the parking lot, too intimidated to come in the building. Bruce was so kind and encouraging, he made them believe they could do it, and they did." When Dr. Benny Hampton left the college in 1992, Bruce became interim president and Talbert Myers became interim dean of continuing education. "I was blessed to work with them who had so much dedication and so much heart," Wanda said.

"Talbert was great to work with. In addition to everything else going on, we were getting the Small Business Center going." And Wanda was still attending Gardner-Webb for her bachelor's degree. She isolated herself on weekends to do homework and write papers. After Wanda graduated, she left Continuing Education for a position in the financial aid office with Kathy Harris. "That was the most stressful job I ever had. Money was coming from so many sources and I had to account for every penny and be ready for grant, state and even federal audits," Wanda said, "but it was a pleasure to work with families when they applied for financial aid for a child or spouse to go to college." The MCC Foundation got organized and had good scholarships for students. Then Judy Miller, head of the business curriculum, announced her retirement and asked Wanda to apply for her job teaching Office Systems Technology. Kathy Harris encouraged her and Wanda was hired before Christmas break, which she spent reading all the books, class syllabi, and every detail of the program. Judy was there the first six weeks as a mentor and guide. Wanda spent the next 14 years in the classroom, an opportunity she said she was blessed to have. Mary Chesson, who had previously taught at MTI, came back to MCC as vice-president of instruction. "She put our mission in focus," Wanda said. "We worked together as a group with the best interests of our students at heart to serve the people of this county. To give our students encouragement and confidence was part of our job." Graduations were "extremely rewarding, the best day of the year." Wanda looks at former students who are now successful in good careers and "that makes me proud." Another group that makes her proud is the mill employees, including her mother, who lost their jobs to NAFTA. "They were hesitant, even fearful and sometimes defensive about their lack of formal education, but with encouragement they became successful employees in other fields. Their work ethic made them successful in school and in other jobs. That makes me proud. The good MCC has done for this county cannot be measured. People are working who are so proud of their education and training and the opportunities they would never have had without the college."

Wanda and her sister, Phyllis, learned the value of work growing up on the family tobacco farm near Star.

"We were part of the farm labor during the summer. Our driver's ed was on tractors and trucks on the farm roads. I earned between \$300-\$400 every summer, which paid all my school expenses. I don't regret a minute of it," Wanda said. While Wanda was at MCC, she and her husband, Ronald, raised two children, Ada and Aaron, a musical prodigy, who is Minister of Music at Christ Baptist Church in Raleigh.

Wanda and Ronald have two grandchildren and are expecting a third.

# The bomb threat

*It was the last day before Christmas break. Students had all gone and the faculty and staff were hurrying to finish their work so they could leave early. In the Continuing Education Dept., Vice-president Talbert Myers and his assistant, Wanda Jackson, were closing up the office when President Ted Gasper told them he needed a statistical report done before the holidays.*

*"We weren't happy about it, but we sighed and went to work gathering information," recalls Wanda. "We thought we were the only people left in the building. Suddenly, we heard a lot of commotion, people running and yelling, knocking and doors slamming. We had no idea what was going on."*

*Just as Talbert opened the hallway door, an officer was knocking, one of many yelling, "Get out of the building immediately. There's been a bomb threat." In the mid-1990s, bomb threats were happening so frequently, law enforcement agencies, schools, colleges and businesses had frequent training in responding to bomb threats.*

*As soon as Talbert and Wanda ran out the door, another officer told them to leave the campus immediately. They did. There was no bomb, but that was one of several threats to MCC, including one from a disgruntled student. Bruce Turner recalls that incident. A very alert Troy Police officer overheard a conversation in a convenience store about a woman who came in to use the phone and was acting weird. There were no cell phones nor surveillance cameras back then, but the officer followed the leads and identified the caller. Bruce said the woman was never charged because she was mentally incompetent to understand the consequences of her actions. Someone had told her to make the call as a joke. Wanda said she doesn't know if that report ever got finished. Talbert took a lot of kidding from co-workers about making the phone call himself. It's funny now, he said, but it wasn't at the time.*

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# Jim Ray

## Staff



When Montgomery Community College alumni get together, Jim Ray's name comes up as one of the teachers they remember most. The memory usually prompts funny stories. At a recent lunch, one former student commented that "Jim Ray talked about historical figures as if they lived down the street and he had had coffee with Ben Franklin that morning."

Jim laughed when he heard that. "Just tell the story," Jim said of his teaching style. "It's the secret, not only in history, but I have seen Rick Kissell and Ken Jarvis do it with numbers." Rick and Ken both taught in the accounting and business administration. "You also want the students to understand that the teacher is there to help them learn, never there to fail you." Jim's former students say he hooked you on the story with his upbeat attitude, ready laugh, and vibrant personality. His own curiosity had already led him to research and verify his stories.

"I started at MTI in 1971, when the school was just getting organized. Bruce Turner and Phil Kissell recruited me. That's the year Marvin Miles became president and Ted Blake kept me on," Jim said. He taught full time for nine years at MCC before he officially retired in 1996, after 33 years in education. Well, kind of retired. "I retired but I wasn't really ready. I missed the classroom, so I taught four years at West Montgomery High School, taught four years part time in the Humanities Department at Randolph Community College, and then taught three years at East Montgomery High School," he said. "That's 44 years in education, but I never considered teaching a job."

Jim still teaches one class at MCC: Technology in Society. It covers colonial times in America until about the 1930s. He was at MCC from its beginning as Montgomery Technical Institute to Montgomery Technical College to Montgomery Community College, and through the tenures of presidents Marvin Miles, Dr. Benny Hampton interim president Bruce Turner, and Dr. Ted Gasper.

"It was a good time with good people. Bruce Turner, Phil Kissell and Ted Blake were as supportive as they could be. I admired Mr. Miles. He was a good man. He never interfered with you, but he knew everything that went on at that school," Jim said, then laughed his infectious laugh. "If he needed a disciplinarian, he sent Ted - and Ted was good at it. For example, some of us staff got lax about the weekly 3 p.m. staff meeting. After just one-stern reminder, without calling anybody out, about the responsibility of punctuality, we were on time from then on. No minor infraction was never held against anybody and it was never mentioned again." "Seriously, we all got along and I know you have heard it over and over, but from the top down, everybody did what they needed to do and whatever they could to help students and the school." Jim's staff family included Sue Agee, Ken Jarvis, Judy Miller, Mary Chesson, Harry McRae, Talbert Myers and Bob Qualls. "All MTI instructors were dedicated. They often put their jobs ahead of other important things, sometimes family, in their lives," Jim said. "The students were just as dedicated as the teachers. They were mostly adults who wanted to learn, wanted to be better at what they were doing. My students were smart, too. They didn't realize how much ability they had." Jim said he enjoyed having U.S. veterans in his classes. "They had done and seen things none of us had. They were serious about life and about their education and brought a different perspective to a class. I was learning as much as my students," Jim said. That's the fascinating thing about history, Jim said. "It's not static, but ever changing. New discoveries about the past come to light and new facts are discovered that doesn't change the past, but enhances what we know. Jim got to Montgomery County because he married the former Linda Russell, whose family lived here and because of the proximity to Duke Medical Center where Linda was, and still is, an outpatient. Jim was born in western Pennsylvania, the son of a steelworker who transferred to Philadelphia where Jim graduated from Pennsbury High School and went to Massanutter, a prep school in Woodstock, Virginia to hone his baseball playing skills. Encouraged by a major league coach, Jim's dream was to play professional baseball. "I was good, but I found out that "good" baseball players are a dime a dozen," he said. "Some of my high school friends were at Western Carolina University, so I went there, too, and majored in elementary education. His first job was teaching 7th grade at Shenandoah Elementary in Virginia. At age 23, he was the youngest, and the only male teacher at the school "All the others were my surrogate grandparents, but they were great mentors," Jim said.

In 1965, Jim and Linda came to Montgomery County where he taught 7th and 8th grades at Star Elementary for three years. He went back to Virginia for a year to teach and coach high school baseball. Back in Troy he taught at Troy Junior High until 1973 when he went to WMHS, all the time coaching baseball and was an assistant football coach.

He was teaching part time at MTI and in 1972, earned his masters degree in education with a concentration in social studies. "When I went full time at MTI, I found out there was life after coaching," he said. He also found himself working alongside former students, Wanda Jackson and Jesse Houser at Star Elementary.

Jim never had any desire to move into administration. "Being in the classroom learning and teaching was too much fun," he said. "I taught geography, too. Once I borrowed a WMHS van and took an earth sciences class to West Virginia on a field trip. Some had never been out of Montgomery County."

He took another group on a rock hunting trip to Mitchell County in the N.C. Mountains. Jim was always a voracious reader. He gravitated toward history, so that is what he chose to teach. The history of MCC is something people ought to know and not take for granted that it just happened. "The founders realized a school needed to be there and they were a group who had a sense of being able to get things done," Jim said. "MCC has opened the eyes of many, especially those who have gone there. "MCC has touched the lives of probably every family in the county. Every student is an ambassador for the college."

# Sue Agee Jarvis & Ken Jarvis

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## Staff

Ken Jarvis was an instructor in Accounting and Business Administration Technologies from 1973-1985 and Business Manager until 1992 when he moved to Forsyth Technical Community College. At FTCC, he served in the capacity of Vice President of Business Services until he retired in 2008.

Sue Agee Jarvis was an instructor in Secretarial Science from 1974-1980 and a counselor in Student Service from 1980-82. Sue left MCC in 1982 when she became an employee of Surry Community College. She served as Counselor/Director of Career Services at Surry and Richmond Community Colleges and as a counselor in Montgomery and Stokes County Schools. She retired in 2006. Sue, from Ellerbe, came to work at East Montgomery High School after graduation from Appalachian State University and later earned her masters degree in counseling from UNC. Ken, from West Jefferson, also graduated from ASU, but the two never met until they were both working at MTI. Married more than 30 years now, they are retired and live in Surry County. Ken and Sue co-wrote their memories and experiences at MTI:

"When we reflect on our early days as instructors at Montgomery Technical Institute, we remember the excitement and pride that seemed to permeate our work environment and our lives. We, and other employees, were excited to be part of a brand new movement in education in North Carolina, the NC Community College System, which was barely a decade old at the time.

"Being almost novices when we began teaching at MTI in the early 1970's, we did not fully understand the significant, long-lasting impact this movement would make on the citizens of North Carolina. We did, however, feel the excitement that is generally present when change is in the air. And, we felt the thrill of the challenge put before us by administrators of the institution— Marvin Miles, Ted Blake, Phil Kissell, and Bruce Turner—when they charged us, "To create and deliver quality educational programs that meet the needs of adults in Montgomery County and make it worth their while to attend classes here."

"Most importantly, we caught the contagious excitement of prospective students when they mustered up the courage to make a face-to-face visit to inquire about this new educational system and learned that what they had heard was indeed true—that quality education, offered at a reasonable price was available within driving distance of their homes.

"Our excitement continued during our tenure at what later became Montgomery Community College; and our feeling of pride grew, as well—pride in being part of positive life-changing experiences for so many, experiences which would not have occurred without the college.

Much of the pride we experienced then, and still do today, was focused on the students—students who saw a glimmer of hope when they came to the college and shared with someone that they never learned to read or write or complete high school and discovered that MTI offered basic skills courses in community sites through the county; students who worked full-time jobs and attended classes during their "off" time, balancing both workplace and classroom demands; students who brought to the classroom tremendous academic potential, a wealth of life experiences, and the determination to sacrifice and persist until they reached their goals; students who built skills for a first career or for a career change; and students who shared with us that they hoped they were modeling a new and better way of living and paving the way for their children to access educational opportunities, too.

"During our early years in the classroom, we experienced tremendous changes in our workplace including the move from the old building on Page Street to the brand new state-of-the-art facility down the road which housed spacious classrooms, a library, an on-site childcare facility, and a communication system which was quite sophisticated at the time—one with telephones with a variety of features and extensions in classrooms and offices throughout the building.

"We also experienced the expansion of educational opportunities including new programs in gunsmithing and taxidermy and the option for graduates of associate degree programs to transfer credits to Pfeiffer University, Guilford College and other private institutions. A while later when MTI became Montgomery Community College, we shared in the joy students felt when they learned that the new College Transfer Program greatly increased transfer options resulting in opportunities to transfer credits

to both public and private colleges and universities. "While taking this walk down memory lane, we are reminded of just how different our world is today from the one we knew when we were young instructors almost 50 years ago. Technology, faster-than-lightning communication and constant change have made our world seem smaller, yet more complex. Still, one thing remains constant for us, and that is our belief that education is a critical factor in personal enrichment and career and life successes. "We are certainly not novices now, not even seasoned educators. We are retirees. Yet, we still get excited when we hear MCC student success stories, and we feel tremendously proud when we learn of both traditional and innovative ways the College continues to shine its light for citizens of Montgomery and surrounding counties. "Happy Fiftieth Anniversary, MCC!"

### *Ann-Marie: MTI's little girl*

*Ann-Marie came into Sue Agee's life as an infant foster child and immediately became the child of the college. Everyone loved Ann-Marie and watched her grow as if they were personally responsible for her health and development. "She really did belong to everyone at MTI," Sue recalls.*

*In the late 1970s, when Ann-Marie was three years old, Sue was turned down to adopt her because Sue was single. Sue's MTI family rose in indignation. They wrote, called and button-holed in person every person they knew who might even remotely have any influence on the Department of Social Services adoption services. Sue said a state representative said to her, "A lot of people sure want you to have this child."*

*Three years later, when Ann-Marie was six, she announced Ken and Sue's engagement at MTI with, "Me and my mommy are going to get married." Sue said all through school, Ann-Marie was proud to say she was adopted twice, first by her mommy and then by her daddy (Ken).*

# Pottery Programs

The first program to bring national and later international attention to Montgomery Community College was pottery. In the heart of historic pottery country, the program was a perfect fit for people looking for a place to learn the art and craft of working with clay.

Pottery was started as a continuing education program and taught by Zedith Teague. When she left to work in her ailing father's pottery shop in Seagrove, Mike Ferree took over in 1973 and for the next 40 years, took MCC pottery all over the world.

Mike had graduated from Asheboro High School and despite his proximity to Seagrove, had never heard more than a passing mention of pottery in his growing up years.

Pottery was just a short course for his art education degree from UNC Pembroke, but he had fallen in love with pottery on a field trip to Seagrove.

"The first time I ever saw a potter at work in his environment was at Ben Owen Pottery. Farrell Craven was turning on the wheel and it was like watching a magic show," Mike said.

"We also went to Jugtown, which was really out in the country, but they were masters of pottery. They knew how to throw pots. Vernon Owens' work was so perfect. The height, width and detail on each piece was perfect. I was hooked."

Mike had graduated from UNC Pembroke with a degree in art education with a concentration in ceramics. He taught art at the middle school in Dillon, S.C. for a year while also teaching painting for adults, an experience that changed his life.

"I then knew I needed more education for a career teaching art at the college level," he said.

He went to UNC Greensboro for a master's degree in fine arts where one of his mentors, Keith Lambert, taught ceramics.

When he heard about a pottery program at a technical institute in Troy, he called Bruce Turner, who was the Learning Center Coordinator.

Mike was amazed when he came for the interview.

The pottery class was in the Annex, a converted car dealership where all vocational courses were taught.

"The building was old and dilapidated, but MTI had more and better equipment than the ceramics department in graduate school. I definitely wanted the job."

The Annex was old and the roof leaked. When it rained, students put boards on the floor to walk on.

"We were all young, the students were dedicated. And, we were very careful about firing the electric kilns with water running under the boards under our feet." Mike shakes his head and shrugs. Young and foolish, he said. "Production pottery was not taught anywhere else in the country at that time and we got students from all over the U.S." Mike said. "The students were committed, so dedicated - very smart and talented people."

Montgomery County was, and still is, full of amazingly talented artists and craftspeople who understood the creative process.

Even if they shook their heads to figure out why someone from Minnesota, or even Japan, would come to Troy to take pottery, county citizens accepted them and supported the craft.

Zedith Teague had built the foundation of a successful pottery program. Bruce Turner and Chuck Marsh had nurtured the crafts and had small classes meeting in every community where half a dozen or more people wanted to learn a craft.

Mike spent Fridays, when MTI had no classes, in the Seagrove pottery studios, determined to build rapport with the industry leaders who would be instrumental in the success of his program. There were less than a dozen working studios at the time, but pottery is cyclical and was being "discovered" once again.

The older, seasoned potters called him "the college potter" at first, but the affable, friendly, eager-to-learn Mike Ferree soon won their confidence. They recognized his talent and became supporters of the pottery program.

Zedith Teague, Dorothy Auman, Nell Cole Graves and her niece, Virginia Shelton, had opened the male-dominated pottery world to women. MTI's classes were always about gender equal, which made for a better class where ideas were always flowing, Mike said.

"Learning production pottery was a good basic education for students and it met the needs of the established potters, who hired many of them as apprentices. As pottery popularity grew in the 1980s and 90s, they couldn't make enough functional pottery. A lot of our students went to work as interns for the established potteries."

Over the years, many students opened their own studios and have earned fame as potters in the art world. Among those who stayed in the Seagrove area are Phil Morgan, David Garner, John Mellage, Fred Johnston, Mack Criscoe, Mike Mahan and Regina Voncannon. The McCaless family of potters started with Millie, who taught her husband and they taught their children, Fiva, Eck, Will and Zeke, who have all stayed in the area and, like the others, have continued to experiment and find their own creative niches in the art world.

The two-year degree program was a positive move for pottery, Mike said.

"We really turned out good potters because they had that extra year to refine their skills," Mike said.

With the two-year curriculum, we needed additional instructors and additional space. "The classes were full. We were like a family of students and



# *Hanging out at the State House*

*When Montgomery County's Bob Jordan was lieutenant governor of North Carolina (1985-1989), Mike asked to have a display of MCC pottery near his office. The result was a huge glass case with not only pottery, but examples of work from the gunsmithing and taxidermy programs. "We had MCC represented in a beautiful display in the hall outside his office door so that everyone coming and going in the State Legislative Building," Mike said.*

*"Mr. Jordan is still an incredibly kind and generous man."*



all worked together to promote our pottery program," Mike said. "In the 1970s and 80s, we went to shows every other weekend from Tennessee to Florida to promote the program and put MTI on the map."

Other artists appreciated the work coming out of the college and added their support, among them Dwight Holland, a design artist for the construction of the North Carolina Zoo and Lenton Slack, known in his own right for the interior design program at Randolph Community College. Ferree and Slack formed a professional and personal bond. For over 25 years now, they have held a joint show of their individual paintings and pottery. They make a collaborative piece for the Zoo-To-Do every year and challenge themselves to be more creative, just as they challenged their students.

In his 40 year teaching career, Mike said there has never been a negative comment from the college administration about the pottery program.

"We didn't get everything we wanted," he joked, "but we always got positive feedback and support."

"Every board member and every president has been supportive. You can't find a nicer or more professional group of individuals than MCC employees."

His dedication to his curriculum and students was recognized when he was named Instructor of the Year. In 2000, Mike was presented The Order of the Longleaf Pine by Gov. Jim Hunt.

When he retired at the end of 2013, the MCC Board of Commissioners honored him with a rare Resolution of Commendation that recounted his contributions to the college and professional crafts.

It noted his that he had worked diligently and patiently to recruit hundreds of students in the art of pottery; has been the model for pottery instruction, reaching out regionally to share his skills and techniques; has worked tirelessly for donations to the pottery program, helping to establish the Ashley Albright Foundation Scholarship; and, will always be revered as the pottery icon for Montgomery Community College."

## *The N.C. Zoo Totem*

*Mike and Lenton Slack had come up with the idea of a totem for the MCC pottery building as a project for advanced students. Lenton had volunteered to teach the class on 3-D Sculpture and Ferree was the technical expert for attaching the clay sculptures to the clay rounds and monitoring the curing and firing.*

*Then one of the vice-presidents suggested making a totem as a permanent exhibit for the N.C. Zoo. It was an ambitious project with 22 cylindrical sections, each measuring 10x7 inches and weighing approximately 16 pounds. Two people worked on each round.*

*"It was such an intriguing project, we had more volunteer potters than we needed and had to turn people away," Mike said. "We literally had to babysit the rounds to keep them round and whole as they dried. I kept them in my basement at home."*

*The totem, named the Piedmont Totem, was dedicated at the N.C. Zoo on July 9, 2012. It is located between the Sonora Desert and Honeybee exhibits.*

*The zoo design staff suggested the theme of animals and plant natives to North Carolina. The designs start with underwater images at the bottom and move up through the natural world to a soaring eagle at the top. The images are so realistic, zoo staff frequently get calls to report a snake on the totem.*

# Emergency Medical Services (EMT) certification Programs

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Emergency Medical Services (EMT) certification was one of the most important programs Montgomery Technical Institute ever had, said Bruce Turner.

"It serves all the people all the time."

Bruce was the director of Continuing Education when the NC Legislature mandated standardization of emergency training for rescue squad personnel, policemen, firemen, and ambulance attendants as a condition of the 1964 President's Commission on Highway Safety. This standardization led to the first nationally recognized curriculum for EMS—emergency medical technician—ambulance (EMT-A)—which was published in 1969.

"Bruce had seen this standardized training coming and started the program at MTI in the early 1970s when classes were still in the Annex (a renovated auto dealership for MTI classes). I believe we were the first in the state to offer training," said Kathryn Crouch RN, the first EMT instructor at the new college. "I know we had an official from the state office, his name was Graham Hunter, who came often to see what we were doing."

"When Bruce first approached me with the idea, I was hesitant, but we talked about how we could do it and set up the program," Kathryn said. "It was trial and error that first year on teaching the skills. Every book I had was threadbare by the end of that first year."

"We had some outstanding students. Almost all of them were volunteer firefighters and rescue squad members and they were anxious to learn," she said. "They worked regular jobs, volunteered and came twice a week to three-hour classes."

After that first class, which had a few students who realized that work wasn't for them, MTI had 100 percent passing rate on the state EMT certification exam. Kathryn said the two-part exam started with a practical test on skills. That included preliminary examination of the patient and certain procedures, such as blood pressure, heart rate, splints and emergency first aid. It was not easy, she said, and those who didn't pass the practical did not go on to the written exam. Kathryn said the most groans from students were the weekly vocabulary test of medical terminology.

"They all remember that," Kathryn laughs as she also remembers. Kathryn was as dedicated as her students. She, Bob Gaddy, Glenn Poole (first class graduates, both now deceased) and Mackie Buie, took training to be certified evaluators who approved practicals in other colleges as other EMT programs were started. Her reputation as an evaluator was the same as in the classroom: Tough, but fair.

"It was cut and dried. If you can't do it, you don't pass. You are dealing with people's lives," she said. As all the Montgomery County personnel were trained, rescue squads were established in Star, Candor, Troy and Mt. Gilead. Kathryn said she enjoyed teaching and was proud of her students as they were certified and went on higher certifications. Some progressed on to medical degrees, RNs, and other medical technology fields. She recalls all of them, but especially Boyce Pigford, Gary McCaskill, Ricky Batten, Barry Britt, Phyllis and Jerry Cornelison, Robbie Smith and Randy Kearns.

**Randy Kearns** came to Montgomery County as the first Emergency Services Director. He earned his associate degree at MCC, the first of many degrees as he advanced in emergency services training, became a paramedic, and continued his education at universities in health care administration and adult education. According to the Mount Olive University website, Dr. Randy Kearns is now the Chair for the Healthcare Management Department in the Tillman School of Business at Mount Olive University Mt. Olive, N.C. In 2014, he retired as a Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**Phyllis Cornelison** is retired from Pinehurst Oral Surgery & Dental Implant Center where she was the anesthesia coordinator.

**Barry Britt** continued his education and served as the Emergency Services Director in Moore County and EMS Director/Chief in Wake County and as an associate professor of Emergency Medical Services at Sandhills Community College. According to the Vairkko, formerly EMS Toolkit, website, Barry is Vice President of Business Development.

**Ricky Batten** is a paramedic at FirstHealth of the Carolinas.

**Gary McCaskill**, affectionately known as "Gary Mac," also works at FirstHealth. And the list goes on ... Toni Goodwin, Wayne Lynthacum, David Dutton, David Barbour . . . and others remembered at MCC and appreciated by the citizens.

**Robbie Smith**

Robbie has come back to Montgomery County as Director of Emergency Services after 20-plus years with FirstHealth of the Carolinas, the last 19 of those years as operations supervisor in Chatham County. When he graduated from East Montgomery High School in 1971, anything medical was not in his thinking. He worked for NC DOT for 11 years. Then Boyce Pigford talked him into joining the rescue squad for six-months. He was hooked and hasn't looked back. Robbie enrolled at MTC and was certified in 1981. Mackie Buie was his instructor.

"That was a total change in my life," he said. Robbie fully agrees with Bruce on the importance of EMS training.

"At one time, MTI, later MTC and now MCC, trained one in 17 EMTs in the state. People came from all around to train there. Bruce was right about serving all the people, too. I have never had a person turn down our help."

He did get shot at once – not by a patient – but law enforcement tries to keep the emergency personnel out of risky situations. Robbie said it was not unusual for EMS students to continue training and to go into medical fields. Montgomery was also one of the first to be a paramedic standard county. Barry Britt was instrumental in setting it up. Almost every EMT enrolled in the Paramedic class. Training was intense.

"In addition to the classwork, we had to complete 500 hours of clinical training, including obstetrics, operating room and psychiatric training before we could take the state exam. Students were dedicated and sacrificed a lot of time away from home," he said. "But, that gave us so many more skills we could use and we were fully staffed. People said you had to inherit a paramedic position because no one ever left."

Pharmacist Barry Carpenter and Dr. Charles Highsmith were dedicated to training in the clinical settings. Robbie said MCC has meant a lot to Montgomery County, especially the opportunity for training in emergency services and to get certified as paramedics.

"MCC turned out remarkable students who went on to do remarkable things," Robbie said. As the 911 system was established, the role of the paramedic has taken on major responsibility. They are called, and respond to, everything from a minor laceration to fatal health and vehicle accidents.

"We have become an extension of the emergency room and have to have a good rapport with the staff."

The best part of a paramedic's job is delivering a baby, Robbie said, smiling. "You hear that first cry of new life coming into the world."

The worst experience? "Anything dealing with kids. Sick and hurt children are hard on us. Some memories never go away."

In 1992, while responding to an emergency, Robbie and his team were involved in a serious wreck with a train on Dusty Level Road. He was airlifted to UNC Hospitals at Chapel Hill, but made a complete recovery. From that experience, he learned from the critical stress debriefing team the necessity of finding a way to reduce stress.

"I play golf now, and believe it or not, I love to mow my yard. That's relaxing," he said. Emergency personnel will always be needed. Robbie said, because people are not taking any better care of themselves and not getting any healthier. Robbie would like to see basic EMT classes offered in high schools and make a CPR class mandatory. Think of how many lives could be saved if one out of three people knew how to administer CPR, he said.

Robbie's position in Montgomery County is another learning experience, particularly administering the programs, such as emergency management and disaster preparedness.

"I have been in emergency services for 37 years now, and you never stop training and you never stop learning."

#### **Donna Strong**

Donna Strong took the EMT class at MTI in 1981 and joined the volunteer EMS at Star while employed full-time at a hosiery mill. She remembers when rescue squads operated independently and had very little in the way of equipment and supplies.

"There was one paid ambulance out of Montgomery Memorial Hospital at the time. Everything else was run separate and they were all volunteer squads," she said.

In 1986, Donna was elected president of emergency medical rescue and she remembers writing to the county commissioners to encourage a county-wide EMS system.

"The only way for EMTs to progress was to have a county-sponsored program," she said. The county commissioners agreed and later hired Randy Kearns as the first EMS director.

"They got a grant to start the first Paramedic program in 1988 and Bruce Turner was the go-to person," Donna said. "I was in that program. Robbie Smith also took it at the same time. Barry Britt was the instructor."

While Donna was taking the class she was hired by Montgomery County EMS part-time and when she graduated in April of 1989 she was hired full-time. In 1990 Donna began teaching EMT classes for MCC and helped teach the second Paramedic class at MCC.

During the next ten years Donna worked as a flight Paramedic for Carolina Air Care, and then for Moore Regional Hospital's critical care team. When Moore Regional and Montgomery Memorial hospitals were united under FirstHealth, FirstHealth took over the ambulance service.

In 1999 Donna became Director of FirstHealth EMS Montgomery County. With her critical care transport team, they began building a curriculum, what Donna called "self-learning packs" where EMTs could earn their 36-hours of mandated annual training.

Another community college had begun providing the training online. Donna began working with MCC to get the classes online there as well.

"Some of the instructors there helped us review the materials to see if it could be done, if the reading level was acceptable, and if the amount of material would constitute three hours of continuing education units (CEUs)," Donna said. "Tom Sargent (distance learning director) helped us get the classes on Blackboard (an online learning system)," she said.

Once the classes were placed online, enrollment grew rapidly.

"Suddenly everyone was taking these classes online. We set three hours each per month for Advanced and Basic Life support personnel. I had an average of 1,800 grades a month by hand," Donna said.

"EMS in Montgomery County was built through volunteers, folks who lived in the community and gave back by volunteering. As EMS advanced, it developed into career for people. MCC was an important part of the process in building an EMS program," Donna said.

In July, Donna took a position as Director of Critical Care Transport and Inter-facility Transport with FirstHealth where she is in charge of all the medical transport teams for FirstHealth medical facilities.

In 1995, MCC began an Associate in Emergency Medical Science degree program to give EMTs and Paramedics an opportunity to advance in their careers with a degree. Jeff Beinke was hired as the program head. As the program grew, a second instructor, Brian Raming was hired in 1997.

Brian had a B.S. in Emergency Medical Care from Western Carolina University. While at MCC he earned his MBA in Healthcare Management. Brian came to North Carolina from Boston, Mass. At the time there were only about five Paramedic bachelor's degree programs in the county and Western Carolina was one of them. MCC's associate degree program was also one of few at that time.

The students learned basic EMT and then tested for that credential. By the end of the program, they were eligible to test for the Paramedic credential.

"Paramedics and EMTs can test without getting a degree, but a degree in many cases meant an increase in pay. It also allowed them to go on to get a bachelor's degree," Brian said.

Brian said the thing he remembers most about MCC were the people he worked with.

"I enjoyed being part of the faculty. The students were great. We had very close relationships with the students. The classes were so small so we could give them individual help," he said.

Another thing Brian recalls is when FirstHealth donated one of their ambulances for training.

"We had it repainted and we used it for training and for P.R. in parades. It gave us an environment to teach the students. It was actually what they would be doing on the job," Brian said.

Perhaps the most vivid memory Brian had of his time at MCC was after the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

"(Two students) saw the attack on TV and came back to the classroom. I was giving a test that morning. They said, 'We're going to New York,' and I said, 'No, you're not,' and they said, 'Yes, we are.' We decided to go as a group. Six students went. Jennifer Jones, Ted Moore, Patti (Fulk) Kenyon, Emily Saunders, Amanda (Jordan) Helms, Austin Nabet, and me. When we got to Ground Zero there was this tent with medical equipment. We were told to make use of whatever we knew how to use. We told them we were not credentialed to use anything and they said, 'Welcome to Hell, do whatever you need to do.'"

The students ended up manning the only medical site at Ground Zero for 16 hours. During the trip, the mother of one of the students passed away and they had to purchase a plane ticket to send him home. Later, upon returning to MCC, they received a hero's welcome.

"The staff there had raised enough money to pay all of our expenses and even the student's plane ticket." It was the kind of place MCC was.

"I loved my time at MCC. I loved the people I worked with. It was a great first stop to learn to be an educator," Brian said. Brian is now Dr. Raming and is currently the Director of the Master of Health Sciences program at Western Carolina University. He still teaches adjunct online classes for MCC.

EMS was discontinued as an associate degree program in 2008, but is still offered as a continuing education class.

*"At one time, MTI, later MTC and now MCC, trained one in 17 EMTs in the state. People came from all around to train there. Bruce was right about serving all the people, too. I have never had a person turn down our help."*

# Art Programs

Art is the oldest continuous course at Montgomery Community College. Before Montgomery Technical Institute was established in 1967, art classes were held in Troy by Randolph Technical Institute's Continuing Education Department.

"Montgomery County has always been a place of creative people. Aspiring artists were always ready and willing to learn. The interest has always been there and it was just natural for MTI to start an art class," said Bruce Turner, one of the first MTI employees in 1968 who later headed the continuing education department for many of his 34 years at the college.

"The first MTI art instructor was Don Bristow, who left to open his own business, followed by Mary Kay Spear and then Don Henderson. Ms. Spear is deceased and we have lost touch with Don Bristow and Don Henderson, but I think he is still in Greensboro," Bruce said.

Art instruction is still a continuing education course with no credit and no degree awarded, but never lacks dedicated students who just want to learn and practice the unending magic of images on paper.

The next two instructors, Zane Lee Simmons and Talmadge Moose, are also deceased but had long tenures and left many good memories and lasting legacies in the art world.

## Zane Simmons

In 1974, Zane Simmons had just left his job with UPS to devote his time to painting. Zane's mother, Estelle, was taking GED classes and went on to complete her degree in secretarial science. At the time, she showed Bruce some of Zane's sketches and painting.

"When I saw his work and then talked with him, I knew he would be a good one," Bruce said. "He was incredibly talented and when he got comfortable with you, let his incredible intelligence, dry wit and sense of humor come out. He loved Montgomery County and its people."

Zane wrote in 1979: "I wonder how many of us could live happily somewhere else if we knew we could not lift our eyes and see our piney woods, the Pee Dee River, the Uwharries, or our peaches. To have a sense of place is a gift and many people in Montgomery County have it and they know exactly where they are."

Zane was born in 1943 in Newport News, Virginia and his family moved to Biscoe when he was five-years-old. He graduated from Biscoe High School and worked at Seagrove Lumber and in his father Raleigh's welding shop in Biscoe. In 1963, he and his wife, Carolyn, moved to Kernersville where he worked at UPS and took a correspondence course in art. They had two children, Zane Lee Jr. and Melissa. In 1974, they moved back to Biscoe.

In 2005, 25-years after his death, Beverly and Chad Dickson curated a retrospective of his work at Artifex Gallery in Troy. The 90 paintings in the exhibit emphasized the rural landscape and harmony in nature that Zane once described as "variation, growth, regeneration, contrast, harmony... above all... a balance of forces to achieve unity."

Zane had his students study the works of great artists and learn by copying them. He added an extensive collection of art books to the MCC library. He read for pleasure and to understand the world around him. That included philosophy, psychology and anthropology and he carried those impressions into his work.

He was so lost in concentration, it didn't bother him for people to watch him paint. Before he touched a canvas, he had previously sketched every meticulous detail so that it appeared that the picture just flowed off the end of his brush. His classes went on field trips to sit by a creek or in the Uwharries, not just to paint, but to absorb their surroundings, to "see God in the smallest seed and blade of grass."

Zane was a master of watercolor, the most unforgiving medium, and of seeing the play of light and colors that he impressed on his students to look for.

He wrote in his journal: "If artists are anything, they are curious, above all curious about how things look. They have a visual curiosity that cannot be satisfied."

He was introspective, but Zane had a fun side and loved a good joke. His sense of humor and dry wit endeared his students to him. He was a great mimic and loved puns and plays-on words. He would playfully ask, "What color is that rock?" - or some other inanimate object. "Nope. Rock is not a color. Look at it until you see the pinks and greens, the lights and shadows."

"I wanted people to discover things, things were always there, but they did not know how to look for," he said.  
Zane died on Jan. 18, 1981.

"The hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life, was to go into his classroom the next morning and tell his students that he had passed away," Bruce Turner still tears at the memory.

## Talmadge Moose

Talmadge Browers Moose came to MCC to teach art in early 1981 after Zane Simmons passed away. He brought a new perspective, a new vitality and his own outgoing personality to the class, but he also had that sense of place.

Talmadge was born and raised in Stanly County where he painted life around him. As he grew up in the 1930s and '40s, he kept a sketch pad at hand. He worked in his dad's country store and for his uncles on their farms. His rural scenes and people and that sense of place



**Zane Simmons  
(selfportrait)**

resonated with people everywhere as they recognized themselves and their communities in his work.

His successful career won him national acclaim, he never strayed far from his roots, wrote his wife, Ruth Moose, an award winning poet, short story writer and now a novelist.

Ruth told one of Talmadge's favorite stories in a profile in Our State Magazine in 2011: "Throughout his career, Talmadge won awards and received acclaim. He had several one-man shows, including one in the Russell Rotunda in Washington, D.C., and *Eight Apiece* appeared in an exhibition at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. His works toured the country with the Springs Mills Traveling Art Shows.

"But the show that I remember meaning the most to Talmadge was held in Cape May, New Jersey. One man spent an hour studying Talmadge's paintings. He walked away but then came back twice more for long periods.

During his last visit, he sought out Talmadge and said to him, "I've never been to North Carolina, but I think I know it now from your work."

"Talmadge loved that story and repeated it often."

"*Eight Apiece*" was the whimsical title a drawing of his grandparents for the buttons on their clothes. Ruth was teaching creative writing courses at MTI when Bruce approached Talmadge about teaching art after the untimely death of Zane Simmons. The students were immediately drawn to Talmadge's positive outlook on life, his offbeat sense of humor, his sense of who and what they, and he, were and his cheerful personality.

Peggy Brewer, local artist, couldn't take his art class because she worked full-time running the bookstore at MCC.

"After work, I would show Talmadge my art and ask for his opinion and suggestions. He was so gracious and so helpful," she said, "And, he was funny. I remember asking him if he thought I could learn to paint watercolors and, with that twinkle in his eye, he said, sure, if I learned to loosen up a little bit." He stayed at MCC for 15 years.

When Talmadge was 12, he checked out the only art book in the Stanly County Public Library so many times that it had to be re-bound, and he fell in love with Norman Rockwell's Saturday Evening Post covers.

Ruth recalls that Talmadge illustrated the Albemarle High School yearbook. When he graduated in 1951, he received the art medal. No art classes were offered in school, but Talmadge took drafting, which he said taught him to see, and shop, where he built himself an easel. He created his first painting – a worn high-top shoe – with a basic oil-painting kit and shoe polish. It is in a collection of his work at the Stanly County Historical Museum.

Talmadge had been accepted into pharmacy school at UNC Chapel Hill, but two weeks before classes started, told his parents he wanted to go to art school. Flora and Cecil Moose were not pleased, but they paid for four years at Richmond Professional Institute in Virginia.

Talmadge once said he made C's on term papers he wrote on Norman Rockwell, because his art professors considered Rockwell an illustrator, not an artist. He proved that illustrators are artists. His meticulous details were drawn with #2 pencils, his favorite tool.

After college, he created window displays for department stores, worked for an advertising agency, as a technical illustrator and a textile engraving company. His illustrations were commonly seen on packaged food and candy wrappers. Ruth recalled that he ate, slept and breathed art. In his home studio and in class, a sure sign of a happy man was when he hummed while he worked.

Talmadge illustrated articles for Our State magazine, books and brochures. He did works in watercolor and acrylic for Southern World. Most of the portraits of former MCC trustees and presidents in the boardroom at MCC were painted by Talmadge.

Talmadge also loved teaching. He set up the first graphics department at Stanly Community College and had taught at Randolph Community College as well as MCC. He held art workshops, including paint-ins in a Morrow Mountain State Park meadow.

Ruth and Talmadge raised two sons, Barry and Lyle, at their home with side by side studios on

Stony Mountain in Stanly County. In 1996, Ruth started teaching creative writing at UNC and they moved to Fearrington Village.

Near the end of his life in 2003, he told Ruth: "I've had a good life. I did what I wanted to do."

His collection of 996 arts books were given to the Ben Long School of Realism in Asheville and the rest to the Arts Incubator in Siler City, which set up a small art library in his name.

### **Joe Grebner**

Franz Joseph "Joe" Grebner began teaching art at Montgomery Community College in October 1992, a year before Talmadge Moose left MCC. The two instructors taught concurrently, but Joe taught evening classes while Talmadge taught during the day.

Joe's father had Austrian-Hungarian roots and so Joe was named after the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, Franz Josef. His parents were accomplished artists but did not pursue their talent until after they retired when they enrolled in the pottery program at MCC. After graduating, they went on to be very successful potters, holding shows and selling pottery all over the state.

Joe graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he received his degree in fine arts and English. After graduating, he moved to Raleigh and helped start the Raleigh Arts Community where he served as treasurer. The community opened a gallery, taught art classes, and held a new art show every month. Within a year the community had grown to 40 members, received a charter from the state, and incorporated.

Later, Joe moved to Boston where he earned his living as a full-time artist. He had art shows in galleries around Boston. He also enjoyed displaying his art and painting on the street. Joe describes his art as philosophical. He has never limited himself to a particular media for this reason.

"My whole purpose in doing art is to communicate ideas, putting ideas into art. Some ideas work better as paintings, or as video clips or sculpture," Joe said. Most of his work was done before the advent of the digital age.

"It took a while before the computer programs could handle the file size of the images, so most of the images I produced had to be done in a medium predating the computer," Joe said. Most of his early work consisted of paintings and drawings done in a style that suited an idea and effectively



**Joe Grebner**

communicated the idea.

"What was surprising is that cartooning kind of drawings carried ideas better. Even though people prefer photo realism, they look more at the technique than the subject. Ideas seem to be carried best in fanciful imagery," Joe said.

After living in Boston for 13 years, Joe moved back to Raleigh to carry out a commission on a 3,000 square-foot mural at city center. On a visit to see his mother in Mount Gilead he learned about a teaching job at Montgomery Community College. He ended up moving home after being offered the job teaching art at MCC.

For several years Joe taught curriculum art classes for pottery, taxidermy and gunsmithing students. At that time, a drawing class and a design class were required by students in those programs. Joe also taught continuing education art, film photography and later, digital photography.

During the next 25 years the art class lived on in the continuing education department having been renamed multimedia art. Many long-time students came and went, and came back again to take classes from Joe.

"Most students come to paint," Joe said, "and so it's water color, acrylic and oil. But some people like to do drawing. I've had a few sculptors over the years too," he said. There were many notable students who took art classes at MCC, so many in fact, that Joe declined mentioning their names.

"I wouldn't want to fail to mention someone but what I will say is that almost without exception, everyone in that class was good. It's surprising that Montgomery County and the surrounding area has so many talented people. It's surprising that they are as good as they are," he said. Joe's students have held art shows at MCC and at the public library in Troy. For several years, the North Carolina Community College System was called upon to select artwork from various community colleges to be displayed in state offices. Many of Joe's students have had their work displayed there.

Joe now enjoys being able to work part-time at the college, giving him time to dedicate to his art. One of his more recognizable works is the Town Creek Indian mural he painted on a two-story historical building in downtown Mount Gilead.

The multimedia art class is no longer held on MCC's campus. In true MCC fashion, the class has moved out into the community where it is accessible to a larger number of students.

Now located in the Senior Center on Page Street in Troy, Joe says, "It's a great space with plenty of room. We now have 12 students in the class." It looks like the longest-running class at Montgomery Community College will continue to have a long and happy life thanks to the many talented people in Montgomery County.



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our community and its  
people is appreciated.*

*- Anna and Russ Hollers*

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# Business Programs



Judy Miller started her teaching career at Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) 1971, the same year Marvin Miles became the second president, and retired 30 years later in 2000. She taught and headed the business department through five presidents - Miles, Dr. Benny Hampton, interim president Bruce Turner, Dr. Ted Gasper, and Dr. Mary Kirk - and three name changes - Montgomery Technical College in 1983 and Montgomery Community College in 1987.

Judy followed Bonnie Bunch and Ellen Turner in the Secretarial Science program. Jim Soufas taught accounting in the Business Administration program. "I was fortunate to spend my career there. I felt like I was at home," Judy said. Judy was recognized as a smart, dedicated, innovative, professional teacher who had a rapport with her students. She took whatever she was assigned to do and made it a success, including teaching at Southern Correctional Institution where barely 5-foot, barely 100 pounds Judy had that same rapport with inmate students and was proud of them when she saw their names on the honor rolls.

"Working in a prison setting was an eye-opening experience. My students were hand picked as those likely to succeed with a degree. I worked very hard there," she said. Sue Agee joined the Secretarial Science staff in 1974. They were fearless about trying new ideas to build student confidence, self-confidence and proficiency.

"We valued our students. Most of them were married. They had children. They had family responsibilities and yet they were determined to find a way to get a better job. As the mills closed, women would come into our program with such doubt and some fear that they couldn't succeed. There was a lot of mutual respect," Judy said.

Mr. Miles had told Judy to "take your students from where they are to as far as they can go." Judy and Sue took that literally and arranged field trips to educational sites, to workshops and to seminars. Some of them had never been as far as Greensboro or Charlotte. "We took a group to a Glamour Workshop for professional women (that included clerical positions) put on by Glamour Magazine," Judy said. "It was wonderful." For over half of MTI's existence, Judy would write new curricula, recruit new instructors and students, witness tremendous growth, get to know dozens of staff and administrators and hundreds of students. "My first class had only two students: Estelle and Norma. Estelle's son, Zane Simmons, would later teach art and make his name as an artist," Judy said. "Barney Green was in my first typing class. Beth Smith, Wanda Stevens (Jackson) and Kathy Harris were all students."

All four went on to work at the college and retire from there, except Beth Smith who is now vice-president of Student Services. Another outstanding student was Mary Morris (Gaffney) whom Judy recommended as secretary to the Continuing Education Department.

"Mary soon knew as much about Continuing Education as anybody. It was a sad day for all of us when Mary passed away suddenly. We were family at MTI and we had lost a dear family member," Judy said. Mary Gaffney suffered a fatal embolism on Feb. 20, 1991.

Later students who stood out were Kendra English, Mary Britt, Rebecca Dickerson and Becky Wallace. Judy's references were valued to place students with employers, including the college. She looked at the personality, the character, skill level and work ethic to make her recommendations, she said.

When the needs of her aging parents dictated her retirement, she chose Wanda Stevens (Jackson) as her replacement and stayed for six weeks to mentor Wanda as a teacher in the business department. Judy was the first, and perhaps the only, instructor to get a sabbatical for her master's degree. President Marvin Miles approved her return to her alma mater, Western Carolina University, for her master's degree in education with a concentration in business.

Mary Miles, the president's wife, later tapped Judy into the Delta Kappa Gamma, a professional honor society of key women educators in the United States. As Judy was preparing to go a class one morning in 1994, two men in dark suits asked to speak to her. She asked if they could wait until after class. No, they said. They were federal agents who wanted to ask a few questions on the characteristics of Becky Wallace, who was a candidate for U.S. Marshal.

Okay. Judy said she could be a few minutes late. Becky had been a criminal justice student, but had taken some business classes. She was subsequently appointed by President Clinton to the post of U.S. Marshal, N.C. Middle District. Judy was a guest at Becky's swearing-in ceremony. In the beginning, Judy was inspired by the dedication and professionalism of Meg Sinclair and Shirley Jenkins (Practical Nursing), Ellen Turner (Business), Peggy Brewer (bookstore), teachers Jim Ray and Mary Chesson and administrators Bruce Turner, Phil Kissell, Ted Blake and Marvin Miles. In 1978, Judy and Mary Chesson chaired the committee for initial accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and School (SACS). Accreditation was vital for the small, rural college. "Everybody who worked there did whatever they could to help the students and the college succeed," Judy

*Judy gets a surprise*  
*Judy Miller was hired in the summer of 1971. Before the classes started the next summer, she was secretary to president Marvin Miles. That included taking dictation and transcribing his correspondence. "I was fast, keeping up with him as he talked and walked around the office," Judy recalls. "Little did I know that he was reading over my shoulder and that he could read shorthand! I found out when he pointed out an error in a shorthand word.*

# MTI crashed into the glass ceiling early

On June 21, 1980, Second Lt. Nancy Horne landed her NC National Guard helicopter on the MTI campus to kick off an ambitious, day long workshop for women: *Looking Ahead, Moving Ahead*. Sue Agee (Jarvis) and I had organized and coordinated the “Saturday for Yourself” to introduce women to nontraditional careers and to introduce women to resources to advance their careers. In the 1980s, women were just beginning to work in “nontraditional” jobs, such as trades, engineering, law enforcement, management and even as lawyers.

Looking back 38 years, we are still impressed with the participation, 60 women from Montgomery County, and the caliber of presenters, workshop leaders, attorneys and industry leaders who came. How did we do that?

President Marvin Miles said it was “characteristic of a statewide workshop,” even though he later scolded us for a cold letter to a law enforcement agency whose representative was clearly against women in his agency. Sue said she later learned that MTI’s event was the first in the community college system and other colleges began to have them, but none as successful.

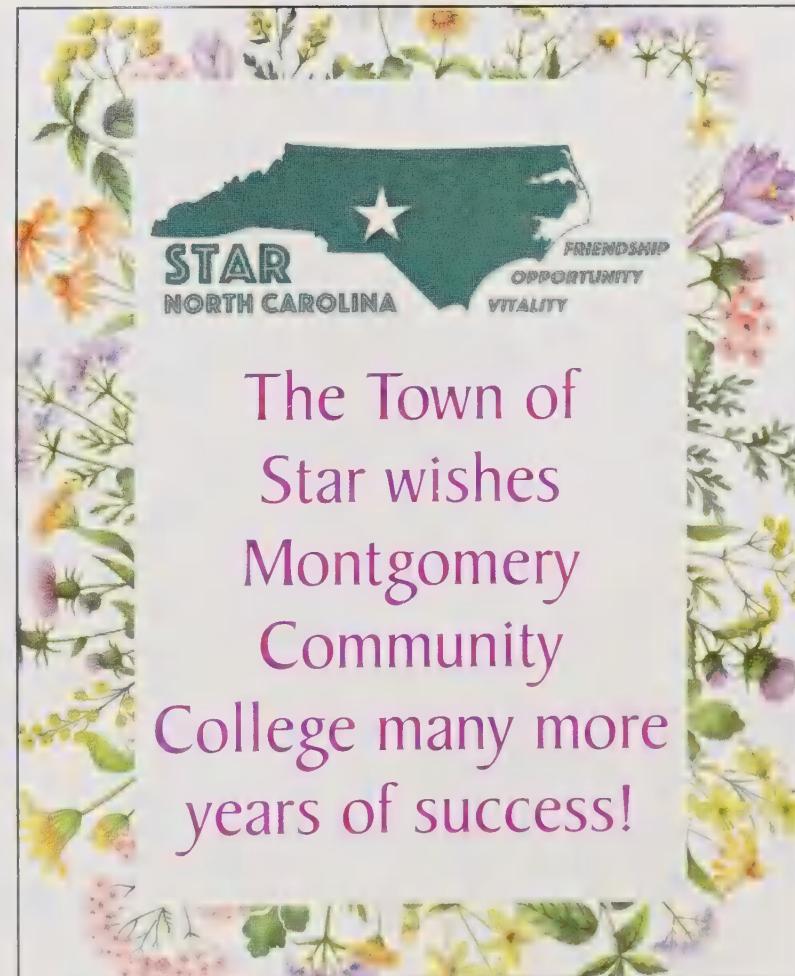
I was the worrier. What if no one came, that our scheduling would be off, that something would go wrong. It went like clockwork and Sue was elegant and cool the entire day. Not as cool as I though. She later described herself as “half scared, half excited.” Young, old, married, single, housewives, students and career women were actively involved in taking skills assessments, hearing career counseling and doing self-esteem building exercises.

They were ruthless in questioning industry representatives about equal job opportunities and listened intently to women who were working in skilled trades, engineering, construction and driving a truck. “We didn’t know this hadn’t been done before. We didn’t think about being proud of ourselves later.

We got into a conversation about a need and just did it,” Sue said. Evaluations were off-the-chart favorable. We had a lot of help, but characteristic of MTI employees, everyone did whatever they could to make the day a success.

said. “We recruited everywhere we went. If we went out to eat, we talked to the server about MTI.” At a later SACS conference in New Orleans, Judy laughs as she recalls that President Dr. Benny Hampton had to carry her one large piece of luggage across the hotel lobby because she couldn’t lift it. “That was before luggage had wheels,” Judy said.

Judy also laughingly remembers a white-knuckle flight to Edgecomb Tech with another instructor. Ted Blake, dean of instruction, had recently earned his pilot’s license and his wife, Linda, was the navigator with a lap full of maps. “Ted did well, but we were happy to get back to Troy.” As chairman of the business department, Judy was also responsible for finding qualified instructors for specialty courses, such as Real Estate Appraisal. “It was hard to find professional people with the right credentials to work for a small hourly salary, but they did it for the college and the students,” Judy said. “Max Garner (Troy attorney) taught Business Law for several years.” Judy appreciated Grady Goforth, who taught her to run the offset press and taught her students the basics to be familiar with printing in the business world. Computers had replaced almost every office machine, except printing, until computer printers became cost effective. As the changes came, Judy took computer classes and “just got in there and learned. MTI was one of the first community colleges to get a T1 dedicated transmission line for computer installation. Musa Agil was the first computer instructor. Over the years, Judy valued her advisory committee and their knowledge of changing needs in business. “Dorothy Harris was valuable on my committee. Our classes were under continuing review to meet the business world requirements,” Judy said. “As new specialty programs came to MTI, we tried to tailor our classes to the needs in business.” Judy also took some classes while she was at MTI. “I learned to knit and to decorate - not bake - cakes. I am not domestic in the least,” she said. “That was a positive aspect of MTI, that people could learn to do whatever interested them. It offered a good mix of skills and academic classes for the people. It gave people opportunities in a place nearby, opportunities they wouldn’t have had otherwise. “We had a lot of respect for our students and they respected us.”



# Criminal Justice Programs

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Criminal Justice instructor and Basic Law Enforcement Director, Bob Qualls, began working full time at Montgomery Technical Institute on March 1, 1977. To understand just how much he impacted MTI's Criminal Justice program and in fact, law enforcement training throughout North Carolina, you have to know a little of Bob's history.

Bob Qualls' law enforcement career spanned some tumultuous times in recent North Carolina history. From working part time at the Graham, N.C. Police Department, he took a full-time position on the University Police force at UNC Chapel Hill. This was in the 1960s when the civil rights movement spawned marches and demonstrations on university campuses all over the country. Although he downplays his role in these historic events, Bob says he was called on to keep the peace on occasion and dealt with demonstrators and marchers during his tenure at UNC.

Bob saw a lot of changes in law enforcement over the years from the technology, to the people, to the training. For example, early in his career there were no electronic records. If a perpetrator was charged in one county, there would not necessarily be a record on file in another county. "You might pick up someone for a traffic violation and not ever know he was a felon," Bob said.

The technology that was available however, could provide some surprises. "There were a lot of spots on the UNC campus where our radios would not work," Bob said, "but you could pick up law enforcement in Virginia and talk to them if you wanted to."

Another change Bob saw in his career was the emergence of female law enforcement officers. "There weren't any women in law enforcement," he noted. "They worked as dispatchers, or with juveniles, or in the court system."

One of the most notable changes that took place over Bob's 30+ year career was training for jobs in criminal justice, and law enforcement in particular. Later, Bob's impact on law enforcement training would become significant.

After working for UNC for four years, Bob changed jobs and began working for the Denton Police Department. He went back to school and got his bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and Sociology from Pfeiffer College. Bob's education included becoming certified to teach law enforcement and to certify law enforcement officers.

"I was the 26th certified law enforcement and school director in the state," Bob said, indicating just how new the concept of certification was. He was also an original member of the advisory committee for the N.C. Dept. of Justice Law Enforcement Training and Standards Commission and stayed on until he retired.

The year he graduated from Pfeiffer, a colleague told him about a job opening for a Criminal Justice instructor at MTI. Bob interviewed and got the job. When he first came to MTI, the Criminal Justice program was only a year old and there were no other programs like it regionally. "We were on the leading edge of changes in law enforcement training at this little school," Bob said.

One of the first things he did was visit law enforcement agencies to find out how MTI could serve their needs. It wasn't unusual to see Bob riding around with local law enforcement officers on patrol, day or night. Bob became fast friends with Montgomery County Sheriff, Eben Wallace, and Wallace became one of MTI's staunchest supporters, going to bat on several occasions to help MTI implement changes in the Criminal Justice program.

The most significant change Bob implemented to meet the needs of county law enforcement was to add several new classes into the curriculum that would train law enforcement officers for certification.

"Training and Standards didn't even exist until around 1972, and there were no mandates over law enforcement training," Bob said. At the time, education for officers and deputies consisted of on-the-job training and certification. MTI's Criminal Justice program included classes in investigations, corrections, probation/parole, counseling, etc., but had no classes that taught the aspects of law enforcement. With the input of Criminal Justice instructors at other community colleges, Bob and four of his colleagues developed five classes that they added to the Criminal Justice curriculum: Patrol Procedures 1 and 2, and Police Science 1, 2 and 3. Once students passed these new courses, Bob could certify them as law enforcement officers and the state Training and Standards Commission recognized the official certification.

"Community college is for the community, to help people get jobs," he said. "I knew if we put these classes into the degree program, people could get certified to become law enforcement officers and get a degree at the same time. We designed the program to fit the community," Bob explained.

Law enforcement agencies began sending their officers to MTI for training. In order to provide a flexible schedule, Bob and his instructors would teach their classes during the day, then teach the exact same classes at night.

"Back then, the officers worked eight hour shifts, so we started what we called 'swing' classes. If an officer missed a class during the day, he could attend the same class at night. If he was on the night shift that week, he could come to the day classes and not miss anything," Bob said. "We had a good program."

One of Bob's first students was Wayne Wooten, who was then the Biscoe Chief of Police. Wayne later became Montgomery County Sheriff, Clerk of Superior Court, and is now serving as a Montgomery County Commissioner. Bob also taught Montgomery County Sheriffs Jeff Jordan and Chris Watkins; current Biscoe Police Chief, Brent Tedder; and many others who had long and fruitful careers such as George Knight, the late E.J. Phillips, and Becky Wallace, to name a few.

It was an uphill battle to keep the law enforcement classes in the Criminal Justice program and Bob made frequent trips to

# *“We were the smallest school with the biggest BLET program in the state.”*

Raleigh to argue his cause. “The bottom line was that we kept the classes in.” The classes stayed in the program until, with the help of their advisory committee, the Training and Standards Commission finally built a 152-hour curriculum, and the Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) program was born. It would eventually be run independently of the Criminal Justice degree program so law enforcement officers could opt out of taking the extra year to obtain a degree.

“We were the smallest school with the biggest BLET program in the state,” Bob said. “We ran it three times a year. People were coming from everywhere. The commander of the N.C. State Highway Patrol sent his son to take the program from us,” he said.

Bob recalls one of his many battles as an advisory board member to the Training and Standards Commission. The Commission was preparing to limit the Basic Law Enforcement Program to five regional training centers across the state, and do away with the smaller community college programs.

“I was always the oddball,” Bob said. “Whenever they tried to implement something that would not go over well for a smaller community like Montgomery, I always fought against it.”

Bob discussed this latest problem with Ted Blake, who was the Dean of Instruction of MTI and his boss at the time. Blake immediately wrote a letter to his colleagues at community colleges across the state. He informed them of the proposed change coming from the Training and Standards Commission. A general uproar ensued from the community colleges. Several meetings took place in response, including one standing-room-only meeting with the State Attorney General and a panel of supporters.

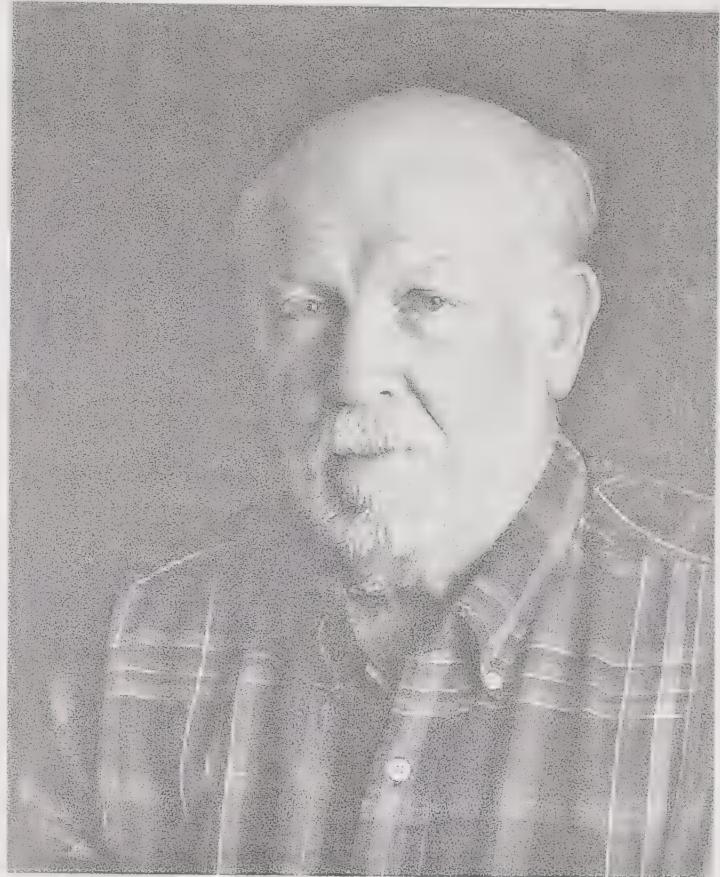
“Eben Wallace came to the meeting to support MTI,” Bob said. “Eben smoked a pipe, and whenever he would get upset his pipe shook. There was a panel of people that supported the change which included the High Point Chief of Police. He was taking questions from the audience and Eben’s pipe started shaking. All of a sudden he stood up and politely told the Chief of Police where he could go, then said, ‘If you’re having problems and you can’t deliver, send your officers down to MTI and we’ll take care of your situation for you.’ Then he got up and walked out with me behind him. By the time we got to the lobby, the meeting broke up. By the time we got back to the Sheriff’s Department, the news media was there with their cameras and microphones. And that was the end of that battle!” Bob said. “It was the kind of support we had here.”

When Bob came to Montgomery County, law enforcement officers practiced shooting at tin cans and were not required to qualify with a firearm. With the backing of the various agencies, they were required to meet certain standards. “I knew it was coming, so we went ahead and started doing it. It was one of the good things about being at a small school. There wasn’t a lot of bureaucracy,” Bob said.

A few years into the program, Bob was at a meeting for law enforcement training officers when he learned about Gardner-Webb University’s degree completion program. Gardner-Webb offered certain degree programs at selected community colleges so students would be able to complete a four-year degree without having to leave their county. Bob pitched the program to MTI President, Marvin Miles, who was all for it. After two very enthusiastic, standing-room-only interest meetings, Gardner-Webb brought their Criminal Justice and Business Administration bachelor’s degree programs to MTI.

“We had some good results from the program here,” said Bob. “We were in the right place at the right time. You hear it all the time but the whole time I was here, everyone’s philosophy was, ‘You know what you’re doing, you know how to do it, take care of your program. They didn’t butt heads or drag things out. We were little. When you came up with an idea, you could try it,’ ” Bob said.

Nowadays Bob likes to tinker in his woodshop. He and his wife Mary Ann like to visit with their 13 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren – not all at the same time. Two of their sons are pastoring churches, one in Bear Creek, N.C. and the other in Lakeland, Ga. Their other two sons reside in Montgomery County.



**Bob Qualls**

# Dental Assisting Programs

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When Lori McAllister came to Montgomery Community College (MCC) in 2005 to start a fledgling dental assisting program, she had been working for 24 years in a private dental practice. As the senior assistant in the office where she worked, she trained many dental assistants – so many in fact, that she considered doing it full-time. So, when the dentist she worked for retired, Lori decided it was time to do something different, and she accepted a position as the first dental assisting program director at MCC.

The program was brand new and Lori looked on it as her own, building it from the ground up.

“When I came on board they had downloaded some of the syllabi from other dental assisting programs and ordered books. I adapted the first year what I thought would work,” Lori said. “Having to bring it to novices was challenging.”

Lori had always taught dental assistants who had been schooled, but not trained with her dentist-employer. Now, she was introducing students with no more experience of dentistry than having their own teeth worked on. However, after training several groups of newcomers, Lori says she finally “got the hang of it.”

“The majority of my first group of graduates, 10 out of 12 I think, are still working in the field,” Lori said. “They were very committed.”

Like most of MCC’s programs, dental assisting started out as a continuing education class to determine the level of interest in the community. Before the first classes were finished, there was a waiting list for the next set of classes, and plans were made to find a more permanent home for the program.

Like any vocational field, special equipment and supplies were required to give the students hands-on experience where they could build skills in an environment similar to what they would encounter outside the classroom.

For the first five years, classes were held in a vacant dental office in Biscoe that was previously home to three different dental practices. The office was made available to MCC to rent, but had very little in terms of supplies and equipment.

“We only had a few instruments and supplies, but we got a grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation which helped us purchase equipment,” Lori said. “We got manikins, an autoclave, model trimmers, instruments, and the supplies we needed to get started.”

The one-year dental assisting diploma program officially started in August 2005 and Lori’s first students graduated in May 2006. In January, five short months after she assembled the curriculum, equipment, and supplies and began teaching, Lori began to pursue American Dental Association (ADA) accreditation for her program. Her goal was for her second group of students to be able to graduate from an accredited program.

“They said we could never do it,” Lori said, ‘they’ being others who attempted accreditation and had to address multiple issues before finally getting the seal of approval. “We had to conduct a very lengthy self-study that involved time outside of the classroom,” she said. Lori completed the self-study in late 2006. It was a testament to her painstaking attention to accuracy and detail that resulted in an issue-free site visit.

Despite the naysayers, the American Dental Association (ADA) Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) accredited MCC’s dental assisting program in February 2007, setting a record for fastest accreditation for a new dental assisting program.

Accreditation meant the students would be able to graduate with Dental Assistant II (DA II) status, making them eligible to perform expanded functions in a dental practice. DA IIs have more marketable skills and can potentially earn a higher rate of pay than their DA I counterparts.

“We only graduated one class of DA I’s,” Lori said with some pride.

In January 2010, the dental assisting program moved to MCC’s campus after the forestry program moved into its own new building on campus. The forestry lab and classroom space were converted into a dental lab and classroom, and the all-female cohort of students took their place on the Third Hall of MCC’s Building 100 amid such male-dominated programs as gunsmithing, HVAC, taxidermy and forestry.

“Third Hall has always been the ‘guy hall.’ Females on Third Hall really changed the culture and even cleaned up some of the language,” Lori said, laughing.

Culture aside, technology and other advancements were changing the character of most programs at MCC, and dental assisting was no exception. As the program matured, it embraced improvements such as digital radiography, heightened infection control standards and more comprehensive guidelines for the profession. This, in turn, meant better proficiency and standardization of procedures for dental assistants. Then, every six years the program is required to undergo another self-study to check its progress in order to retain its accredited status.

“I don’t do it for the paycheck. I do it for the love of the profession,” Lori said. “I arrived at MCC with a love of the field. The program, which is now 12 years old, is like a baby you’re nurturing. You bring it along and it grows along with the profession.”

The dental assisting program has grown and now employs one full-time and four adjunct (part-time) instructors, and has increased its capacity from 15 to 20 students per year.

Lori’s love of the profession communicates itself to her students in such a way that they describe her as a “tough, but great” teacher.

“My philosophy is, if you set the standard high, the ones who really want this will rise to the standard. If you don’t, they don’t have anything to accomplish. We have high standards in coursework, appearance and professionalism,” Lori said.

One of Lori’s students, Mary Kandis Holyfield, graduated from MCC in 2009 and has kept in touch with Lori



**Mary Kandis Holyfield**

took a lot of patience and creativity to do. “It was the right thing for me at the time. I work with kids,” she said.

During this time, Mary Kandis went back to school to earn a bachelor’s degree in sociology. While there, she began training as a dental assistant. Her husband worked at a community college and “It was so much fun for him, I thought maybe I should touch with Mrs. McAllister over the years. When I started, This is my first semester. It’s right where I left off.” Mary Kandis still calls her colleague “Mrs. McAllister” a student.

“Mrs. McAllister was the best instructor I ever had. She is good. The hardest thing I’ve ever done is pass the class. A bachelor’s degree was nothing compared to that. A lot has changed since Mary Kandis went through the program. With technology, she says there has been a change in the students. “They have changed up since I’ve been here, but I wouldn’t expect anything less from Mrs. McAllister. It’s definitely exciting to be on the other side of the room. To Lori, the excitement is seeing the students change into professionals.”

“It has been a real opportunity to see students mature into professionals. I’m amazed at how the students flourish, at their growth, the knowledge they gain, and grow as professionals. To know you have had a hand in it and helped them along with their growth in the profession is very rewarding.” It is also very gratifying for Lori to have the support and commendation of local dentists who accept students into their practices for the students’ required clinical experience.

“Many of our clinical sites hire our graduates after working with them chairside,” Lori said. Dr. Pete McKay in Seven Lakes and Dr. Mark Lassiter in Norwood are two such dentists, and they have only MCC dental assisting graduates on staff. Dr. Lassiter went so far as to state that his practice experienced rapid growth after hiring MCC DA graduates.

“I totally attribute that (growth) to the assistants,” Dr. Lassiter said. “They’re not only great chairside, they communicate well with the patients.” Dr. McKay agreed with this assessment by saying, “You can’t have a better testament to my belief in MCC dental assistants than I have three dental assistants and every one of them went to MCC.”

Lori and Mary Kandis look forward to training more dental assisting professionals and continuing the tradition of excellence that was started with dental assisting 12 years ago at Montgomery Community College.

ever since. Earlier this year the program was approved to take an additional five students per year for a total of 20 students in the program. Another full-time instructor was needed and Lori told Mary Kandis about the position. She interviewed and was offered the job. Mary Kandis went to UNC-Greensboro for three semesters before deciding it wasn’t what she wanted. She looked into several dental assisting programs but said she had a very positive, very personal experience looking at MCC.

Mary Kandis said, “I had to get on a waiting list, but the admissions people at MCC were nice. With the smaller atmosphere, you can talk with somebody and they are ready to help you when you walk through the door. It was homey,” she said.

The dental assisting program was a good fit for Mary Kandis as well. Her university experience of having hundreds of students in a biology class, versus 15 in a class at MCC, made the learning experience more positive. She also preferred the hands-on skills she was able to develop, versus learning concepts from a textbook.

“Community college is more skill-oriented; it prepares you for a job,” Kandis said.

Upon graduation from the program in 2009, Mary Kandis went to work as a dental assistant. For the next seven years she worked with a dentist. She said it was not always a happy experience. It was a fearful or acting out.

“It makes you feel younger working with a kid myself. It makes you feel younger working

for a bachelor’s degree in psychology, with a desire to be a part of a community college team.

” Mary Kandis said. “I always kept in touch with Lori. When she had the opportunity to teach at MCC, I took it.

The professionalism she instilled in her as a

iversity instructors. She was tough, but I liked Mrs. McAllister. Going back to school to get a degree was a good idea,” Kandis said.

“It was a great program. In addition to the



**Lori McAllister**

# Forestry Programs



**Mike Thompson**

adequate to give students the skills they needed to enter the industry.

There were no colleges in the eastern part of the state with a forestry degree program, and only two in the western part of the state. David approached one of his board members, Montgomery County Ranger Russell Strong, about growing an associate degree program.

"I've always been excited about education. David approached me about taking over the program and making it a two-year associate degree," Russell said. David left MCC in the spring of 1993 to return to the forestry industry. Russell took over and began to build the program. He went from 10 students in the fall quarter to 17 students by the winter quarter. With the additional students, Russell felt it was time to approach the new college President, Dr. Ted Gasper, about getting an associate degree program.

"Dr. Gasper gave me 20 hours of administrative assistance and we put together all the research and data required by the Community College System and the State Board," Russell said. In May, 1994 the associate degree in Forest Management Technology was approved. "We carried all 17 students from the forestry skills program into the A.A. program and added eight more so we started out with 25 students the first year," Russell said.

Russell knew that he would need a second instructor when the new influx of students came in the following fall. He was working on a curriculum for the second year students while teaching a full schedule of classes. Registered Forester and arborist Mike Thompson was hired in July 1995.

"We put the curriculum together from scratch," Russell said. "Mike and I sat down and hashed out who was good at what. Mike was good at math and science and advanced forestry classes. It was a great marriage of skills," Russell said. The two instructors complemented each other and assembled one of most comprehensive forestry programs in the state.

Mike said, "We knew what the students needed to know. Russ from the public sector, me from the private sector. We were able to concentrate on what really mattered. 'Excellence in Forestry' has always been our motto."

It was not unusual for them to be in their office until seven o'clock at night pulling materials from textbooks, the public domain, and their own experiences. "We got permission from the textbook companies to

Montgomery Community College's one-year Forestry Skills diploma program began in 1988. The first forestry instructor, David Isner, was hired to develop the new program. David came to Troy from Colerain, N.C. where he was working as a consulting forester.

"With the forest product industry in the area, and the extensive acreage of private and federally-owned timber resources, I could understand Montgomery Tech's need for developing a forestry program," David said in a letter to Dr. Benny Hampton, MTC President at that time.

David worked with an advisory board to get the forestry program started. They assisted him with developing coursework that would provide students with the types of skills employers in the county were looking for. David worked for five years to build the program, but he believed the one-year diploma was not

do this," Russell said. "We put together course packs with everything relevant to forest technicians, and the publishers published them for us," he said. "It took many years to develop. We were always adding, always improving, looking at different ways to teach things. I remember working long hours and late nights and our wives calling asking when we were coming home."

"We couldn't do it during the day because we were teaching," Mike said, "But I loved it."

The two instructors worked out of a closet that was made into shared office space during their first five years – two desks, two chairs, one phone. However, the program dictated that most of their time would be spent outdoors.

MCC's campus sat on 146 acres, only 10 or 15 of which were buildings and parking lots. The rest of the campus was undeveloped forest. Before the forestry program started, MCC President, Dr. Benny Hampton, worked with a forester doing herbicide research on a test plot within the campus forest. As a result of his foresight, there was a 3-4-year-old plantation for the fledgling program to use for instruction. The rest of the land needed management – exactly the type of challenge Russell and Mike liked to tackle.

"We found a cooler summer evening when Mike and I got out into the woods," Russell recalls. "We flagged and marked out different areas. Jordan Lumber agreed to come out and make fire lines and enhance road systems for us," Russell said.

There was a single, old logging road through the woods at the time. "From that one road we now have three-to-four miles of roads, fire lines off different roads and separating different units that we've been managing close to 25 years now," Russell said. Students have played a major role in making the improvements conducting prescribed burns, herbicide applications, researching and collecting data, thinning and harvesting. "Everything they need to learn," Russell said. "It's a huge asset. Many schools have to bus their students to the forest. We just walk out our back door."

The students do visit other private plantations or the National Forest frequently, however. "We have a good mix of classroom and lab work," Mike said, "and there's not a single concept or skill that we teach that we don't apply." Mike says he likes to apply the Carl Schenck Forest School model of teaching, spending mornings in the classroom and afternoons in the field. "Carl Schenck has always been my hero," said Mike. Carl Schenck was a German-born forester who founded the Biltmore Forest School near Brevard, N.C. and is considered the Father of Modern Forestry. "I bring all my classes to the Cradle of Forestry," Mike said.

The Cradle is the national historic site where the Biltmore School buildings are preserved. Each year students compete in an annual timbersports tournament near Brevard and visit the Cradle of Forestry at the same time. Competing in timbersports tournaments was not planned for in Mike's and Russell's course packs. In fact, it was students who got it started. "The meet at the Cradle of Forestry was started by John Palmer in 1996 at Haywood Community College. Our students got wind of it and wanted to attend," Russell said. MCC was invited to participate the following spring.

"We had no experience, no equipment, but lots of enthusiasm," said Mike. Since then, students raised enough money to purchase their own competition equipment. In 2000, Stihl became a major sponsor of the event. The Stihl Timbersports Competition is held on the second day of the meet and is televised by ESPN. Six schools now compete in the Mid-Atlantic Woodsman's Meet and rotate host locations every six years. Montgomery Community College will host the upcoming meet in April of 2018.

Over the years, changes in technology resulted in changes to the Forestry program. When the program first started, there was no Internet and very few computers. "When I first started working at MCC I had a floppy disc with a piece of DOS-based mapping on it and I didn't



**David Isner (left)**

have any way to look at it," Russell said. "Phil Kissell was my boss at the time and he had a 286MB computer. I told Phil about it and he unplugged his computer and gave it to me. Not just to look at the floppy disk. He gave me his computer," he said.

That was the way it was at MCC. The spirit of camaraderie and cooperation was evident to all who walked through its doors, especially those who worked there.

"I have always been impressed by the cooperative attitude here [at MCC]," said Mike. "From maintenance, who immediately responds to our requests, to IT [information technology], I never had a computer class and had to teach myself. They were a great help during the learning curve."

The inception of GIS/GPS technology had a major impact on the Forestry program. Before GIS/GPS, students drafted maps with paper, pencil, and drafting tools from USDA aerial photographs. The college purchased the program's first two GPS units and a forestry student's father donated enough money for four more. "We had three-to-four students on a unit with dial-up internet," Russell said. "Only one student could get on the internet at a time and the line would drop all the time." It might have been faster to do it the old way. Students acquired their base GIS data from the state around 2004. Then MCC got the first GIS base station from Montgomery County which greatly increased the accuracy of data collected. "The technology was changing so fast I had to find guys to teach the class and to teach me how to use it," Russell said.

Mike said that although the industry is utilizing technology, it changes the way they do things, "Most of the classical information is still found in textbooks," he said. Mike does a lot of reading and research outside the classroom and has published several technical articles in industry journals. One such article concerned a breakthrough 'tool' for timber cruising that Mike formulated for Loblolly Pine in North Carolina and Virginia. The formula was a time-saving, money-saving method for timber cruising that was later adopted by the N.C. Forest Service.

Both Mike and Russell have a great relationship with the local forest industry, visiting their land and taking their students on field trips.

"I take my students on mill tours," said Mike. "Yes, you can go to YouTube and see a working sawmill, but nothing replaces actually going to the mill and smelling the smells and feeling the vibrations of the logs coming out. I'm very grateful for their cooperation through the years," he said.

Field trips sometimes resulted in "Adventures in Forestry." On one field trip, students came across a baby goat on a set of railroad

tracks while making their way back to the van. Without Russell's knowledge, the students picked up the goat and carried it back with them. While they were loading up, the goat let out a plaintive "Baaaa," startling students and instructor alike. Russell made the students walk back to the railroad tracks where the other goats frequently grazed, and mother and baby were blissfully reunited.

Infrequently-traveled roads through the woods made challenges for the various Forestry vans. (They have gone through three over the years.) Russell said, "When we're off road, the van gets stuck – a lot. "When we got stuck I'd tell my students that we'd never had to call someone to get us out, and not to be the first class that couldn't do it by pure manpower," he said. "It works every time and so far, we've never had to call for help."

Mike tells a story about taking a dendrology class on a field trip through a very overgrown area around Denson's Creek. "As we were walking, a student kicked an old, rotten stump. You'd have thought someone dropped a hand grenade the way everyone scattered. He stirred up a yellow jacket's nest. Several of us got stung and one of the students was allergic. We high tailed it back to get him some medical attention," Mike said.

As the Forestry program grew, space on campus became an issue. From their first computer lab with four rows of desks where students had to climb over each other to get to the computers, to occupying an old mobile unit, Russ and Mike dreamed of having their own dedicated space for the program. "I had designs on a sketch that I made with square footage and where everything would go," Kissell said. "I approached administration on several occasions, but the budget was never there. On the fifth try everything came together and they let us build a building." That was in 2006.

"I'm grateful for administration for carrying us through the lean years," Mike said. "It's a happy situation where our graduates are now employed. Word of mouth is bringing in a steady stream of new students. In fact, the program has such a good reputation, N.C. State University come every year to recruit students for their bachelor's degree program. "Forestry isn't a college transfer program, but about 70% of what our students take at MCC will transfer to N.C. State's Forestry program," said Russell. "Our students who go there are very successful. We've been told this: they are recognized in the classroom and are all employed very quickly upon graduation," he said.

"Some think they're coming into our program to hunt and fish," said Mike. "They realize very quickly how sophisticated it is. They are making decisions that will affect the forest for decades so they have to make informed decisions. Our graduates are scattered across the state in industry, the Forest Service, land management and timber procurement. They manage large areas of woodland for mills providing raw materials and deal with millions of dollars of product per year," he said, noting that forestry is now the largest manufacturing industry in North Carolina.

Mike and Russell have made known their proposed retirement for the spring 2019, so they are now working on making a smooth transition. A third forestry instructor was hired last year to handle the growing number of students, with the secondary purpose of training for one of the two instructor positions. Dylan Hurley, a 2012 graduate of MCC's Forestry program will be filling some large boots.

Montgomery Community College's outstanding Forestry program is a culmination of over 25 years of vision, work, and faith by two trailblazers: Russell Strong and Mike Thompson. They have planted, nurtured,



**Russell Strong**

# Gene Anderson

## Staff

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The phone call in the summer of 1978 took Gene Anderson by surprise. Ted Blake, dean of instruction at Montgomery Technical Institute in Montgomery County, North Carolina, wanted him to meet him to talk about starting a gunsmith school.

Go where and do what? Leave his home in Pittsburgh and come south to a place he had never seen to establish a gunsmith school at a school he had never heard of? Gene needed some time to think about that. The only gunsmith school east of the Mississippi was Gene's alma mater, Pennsylvania Gunsmith School, where he had taught for 12 years. He was the only student who had ever been hired as an instructor. For two years, he had been the custom gunmaker at Valley Sportsman Supply in Beaver Falls, Pa. One of his former students, Jack McIntyre of Troy, had recommended Gene to MTI and had given him a heads-up to expect a call, but Gene didn't know what to expect. Ted told Gene he had been recommended by Jack and others. His reputation was known among gunsmiths, and his former students admired him as a teacher. Gene was hesitant. He had questions. Ted kept calling. Gene's dad, Dave, put it in perspective. "Dad told me I'd be a damned fool not to take the opportunity to create a school to teach gunsmithing the way I knew it should be done," Gene said. He loaded up some of the best examples of his work and came to Troy for a Sunday afternoon interview. "The best I can remember, Ted (Blake) and Bruce (Turner) were there from administration and I think all the advisory committee members were there. I remember Arron Capel, K.R. Fritts, Herb Phipps, Jack McIntyre, Raeford Brown, Bobby Morris...may have been others. I was anxious, but when I laid out my guns, they were impressed and the meeting turned into a big, friendly discussion," Gene said.

"Gene was instantly liked by the whole crew," Bruce Turner said. "We felt like he was the man to make gunsmithing successful. Talking to him, we knew he wasn't in it for himself. He wanted to see his students become successful. That was always his reward."

Gene moved into an upstairs apartment in Troy and went to work in August. Classes started in September and there was no way to be ready. "We had no equipment whatsoever," said Bruce Turner. Gene said that was an understatement when he saw his classroom - 12 red bench vices on a long workbench.

"Like so many have said, the MTI employees went above and beyond to do whatever they could to help," Gene said. "Barney Green (in purchasing) scoured catalogues, called suppliers, stayed and checked state surplus sales every day. Peggy Brewer made friends with suppliers to see that the bookstore had all the supplies they needed. Bruce called his contacts at the manufacturers and organizations that had supported the program. Bruce said Bobby Morris got a tabletop lathe donated. "It was small, but it was a beginning," Bruce said. "Barney heard about a military surplus warehouse in Baltimore, so Ted Blake flew us out to look. We bought several pieces of machinery and had them shipped back. Ted flew us to several other colleges to pick out what we could use from equipment they had updated," Gene said. "I will always feel bad that students that first year got shortchanged on instruction. We had nothing, but they stepped up and built tables, stands, a rack for blueing tanks and assembled equipment as it came in." "When we were trying to get equipment and get organized, students would get frustrated and discouraged. Bruce would show up with a pep talk, let them know what the administration was doing to get us what we needed and encourage them to stick with us. They did, and they built a lot of things we needed to get started. One of the first students was Jim Mundy, a pipefitter by trade, was a very good welder and did a lot of work for us."

MTI administration and the advisory committee recognized Gene's vast knowledge of the gunsmithing trade and told him to develop the program and mold it as he saw fit. MTI had submitted a required curriculum outline with the program application to the Department of Community Colleges. I was working at MTI at the time and assigned to write Gene's curriculum to fit the state standard. He was specific, meticulous and insistent about what would be taught and when. His curriculum requirements grew into a syllabus, which was later required by state curriculum standards for all programs.

Add to that weekends when he attended numerous gunshows, festivals and meetings to meet supporters, and to promote and explain the gunsmithing program. Meanwhile, Gene was looking for a house for his family. Everybody was looking for a house for Gene because housing was scarce in Montgomery County. Within a few months, he moved into Phil Kissell's neighborhood in Biscoe and still lives there. Gene's parents came to help them do some renovations and get moved in and were guests of Bruce and Ellen Turner for several weeks. "We all wanted Gene to be at home here, at the college and in the community," Bruce said. Gene said Phil Kissell, Pat Brady, Kathy Harris, Karen Frye and Beth Smith and the Student Services staff always went above and beyond assisting students, advertising and recruiting.

Gene's reputation had preceded him. By the second year, there was a waiting list to get into gunsmithing at MCC. Gene was teaching day and night classes. "I knew within a few months that I was going to be overwhelmed and would need help," Gene said. "Mr. Miles (Marvin Miles, president of MTI) and Ted Blake (dean of instruction) were pleased with the program and did all they could to help, but I think it grew faster and bigger than anyone expected. I didn't see Mr. Miles much, but he let me know he had my back."

Gene recruited Pete Erdner as assistant instructor. Pete had graduated from Pennsylvania Gunsmith School after Gene left and they had worked together at Valley Sportsman. Pete owned the gunsmithing part of the business and Gene was the custom gunmaker. "We worked well together. We complemented each other's skills and I knew Pete would be a good teacher," Gene said. Gunsmithing kept getting bigger. Gene reached out to Russ Holmes, a family friend and graduate of Pennsylvania Gunsmith School who owned a gunsmithing shop, and Russ accepted the offer to teach. "Russ and I and our dads had hunted together. We were old friends and I knew how talented he was and Russ was very talented," Gene said. Orientation to gunsmithing always included a math class, focused on measurements, a skill that was lacking in the "new math" generation. Gene insisted on precise accuracy with no room for error, "not even the thickness of a newspaper page," one student wailed. MTI became MTC (Montgomery Technical College) in 1983 and

was gaining international fame for the gunsmithing and pottery programs. Students came from all over the U.S., Alaska to Florida, and from Canada, Japan and Trinidad.

There was no typical gunsmithing student, from high school graduates to retired executives and several women. Gene set high standards, academically and professionally, and expected students to maintain them. But, there were slip-ups.

Gene got a call in the middle of the night by two students at the magistrate's office who had been charged with underage drinking and having a gun in the passenger compartment of a car. He bailed them out, with a stern warning that this was their "one and only young and stupid mistake" that would be tolerated. Students considered Gene their friend and counselor. He went to their cook-outs and parties, took fishing trips with them, went to their weddings and family events. Once, he and Howard Peacock, fellow MTC employee, and a student, John Stevenson, towed a boat and went on a week long fishing expedition in Canada. He listened to their problems. More than once, he bought supplies when a student didn't have the money and paid semester tuitions when that would allow one to stay in school.

In 1984, another community college got a gunsmith program approved and hired Gene's two assistants. MTC had advertised for instructors and Wayne Bernaur applied. Wayne had gone to Gene for advice on becoming a gunsmith when both were still in Pennsylvania. Wayne graduated from the Pennsylvania school, then worked for Pete Erdner and ran the gunsmithing business for six years after Edner came to Troy.

"Wayne was by far the best qualified applicant," Gene said. "I knew we could work together and his business experience would be helpful to students." Walt Heim, a crusty retired U.S. Marine and MTC gunsmithing graduate and machinist, had recently been hired as the teaching load increased.

Gene, Walt and Wayne took MTC gunsmithing to new heights. It took dedication and hard work. They taught Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. and from 6 p.m. to as late as 11 p.m. Most weekends were spent recruiting at trade shows and meetings of professional organizations that supported the program: N.C. Gun Collectors, N.C. Rifle and Pistol Association, the Dixie Deer Classic, the NRA, the Custom Gunmakers Guild, the Firearms Engravers Guild, Jimmy Kelly at Darlington Gun Works, among others.

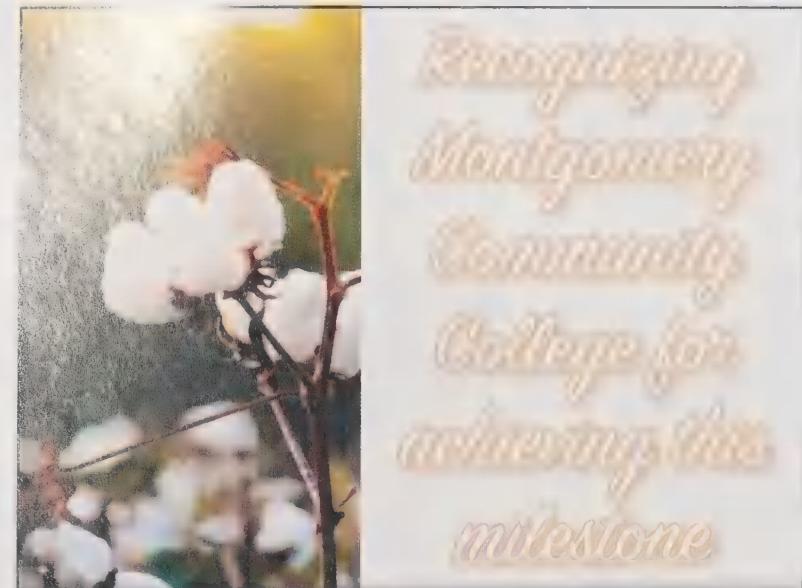
"We were given courtesy booths at prime locations," Gene said. Brownell's Inc. and Midway USA donated supplies and equipment, sorely needed and much appreciated, especially in tight budget years. "Walt, Wayne and I knew that maintaining contact with the individuals and organizations was essential for recruiting and publicity. We considered it part of our jobs," Gene said. "We also knew we had to deliver in the classroom what we promised in our brochures and recruiting talks." Early on, the gunsmithing program had NRA sponsored workshops on weekends to give students and anyone interested more in-depth training on certain firearms and/or procedures. Instructors were the tops in their field. It was not unusual for students to be hired by the teachers.

Several firearms industry executives called for references on graduates, came to visit the school and took specialty classes.

"Having these NRA sanctioned short term classes was a major coup for us," Gene said. "We were the only school on the East Coast chosen and it came about through connections with the N.C. Gun Collectors."

Gene attended the SHOT Show in Las Vegas for the first time in 1986 and two years thereafter where he made valuable contacts and developed friendships among the elite custom gunmakers and engravers in the country. Wayne took on the SHOT Show challenge and continued those personal and professional relationships. Mary Lou was the first MCC president to go to the show and her support made it possible for Wayne to continue going and building support among the major firearms industry leaders. As Gene neared retirement, he knew the program would be in good hands with Wayne. When the mandate came down that program heads would be required to have bachelor's degrees, he pushed Wayne to complete his degree and taught Wayne's night classes so he could do that. Wayne took over when Gene retired in 2000. "I was extremely pleased with Wayne's leadership. He took the program far beyond what we had started. I am glad to see Mark Drye continuing and also doing a good job," Gene said. In 1989, Gene was named Instructor of the Year. The graduating classes of 85-86 and 1999-2001 presented him with plaques for "unselfish devotion, knowledge, professionalism and friendship." "Those were the greatest rewards a teacher could get," Gene said. Since retirement, Gene got interested in local government and is running for his third term as a Biscoe commissioner. He and former student, Jim Kearney, became close friends and are still frequent fishing buddies.

He put his love of woodworking into making several pieces of furniture, complete with artistic inlays. His unique style of gunstocks and intricate inlays still make his guns immediately identifiable to collectors. "MCC gave me an opportunity few people get in their careers. It was a privilege to get to know so many wonderful people who made it possible. I could never remember every name, but all their faces are in my memory, include the hundreds of students I was able to teach the art of gunsmithing."



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# Wayne Bernauer & Jesse Houser Staff



The friendship between Wayne Bernauer and Jesse Houser spanned the length of their careers at Montgomery Community College. During their tenure they helped grow two of the most iconic programs in the college's history. The gunsmithing and metal engraving programs continue to bring national attention to the college and the county.

Montgomery Technical Institute's gunsmithing program was started in September 1978 by a Pennsylvania gunsmith named Harold Eugene "Gene" Anderson. Before that program was started, an aspiring young Pennsylvania gunsmith named Wayne Bernauer was introduced to Gene. Wayne's uncle knew Gene, and the two went to visit him at home to talk to him about becoming a gunsmith. Encouraged by what he learned, Wayne decided to attend Gene's alma mater, the Pennsylvania Gunsmith School.

After graduating, Wayne worked in a gun store with Pete Erdner who owned the gunsmithing part of the business. When Pete left, he sold his part of the business to Wayne. Pete was going to teach gunsmithing with Gene Anderson at a little school in North Carolina called Montgomery Technical Institute.

Wayne ran his gunsmithing business for six years and stayed in touch with Pete and Gene. When he heard that Pete was leaving Montgomery Technical College (the college underwent the name change in 1983) he applied for Pete's job and was hired.

Wayne came to MTC in 1985. The gunsmithing program was very popular and attracted students from around the country. MTC had earned international attention through its gunsmithing and pottery programs. Montgomery County was a temporary home to students from as far off as Alaska, Canada, the Republic of Trinidad, and Japan.

Just a few months before Wayne came to MTC, another gunsmithing instructor was hired to help keep up with the teaching load. Walter Heim was an MTI gunsmithing graduate, a machinist and U.S. Marine Corps veteran. Between Wayne, Gene and Walt, classes were taught Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. and then from 6 p.m. until as late as 11 p.m.

During the early years, the gunsmithing program also ran workshop-style classes on weekends, giving students more in-depth instruction on specific firearms or in specialty areas. One of these specialty areas was metal engraving. Engraving made firearms unique and valuable. Since the gunsmithing program's focus was on customization, engraving was a good skill for aspiring gunsmiths to learn.

An engraver from Virginia named Ken Hurst came to MTI to teach a workshop. Jesse Houser was one of the gunsmithing students who took the class. Jesse had been doing his own engraving for some time and when he showed Hurst a rifle he had engraved, Hurst invited him to come to Virginia to work for him. Hurst later started the Metal Engraving program at MTI as an offshoot of the Gunsmithing program. Jesse developed his skills while working for Hurst and eventually took over the engraving program in 1985, the same year Wayne and Walt were hired.

Jesse knew Walt because they had been students in the gunsmithing program at the same time. However, they took classes at different times so their paths never crossed until one day . . .

"Walt was a day student and I was a night student," Jesse said. "One night he came down to the bluing room and snapped at me, 'What the h#@% did you make such a mess for?' I had never even met him before, so I was wondering why he was talking to me like that. I found another day student and asked him who that guy thought he was. He said, 'That's Walt Heim. He talks to everyone like that.' Walt was a Marine and very gruff. But that was all on the outside. After that, we became good friends," Jesse said.

For the next decade, the gunsmithing and engraving programs flourished under Gene, Wayne, Walt and Jesse. In 1994, community colleges went from quarters to semesters. MCC (which underwent another name change in 1987) was able to offer two-year college transfer degrees. The gunsmithing program began to attract younger students who were searching for careers. However, during the Clinton Administration, two major pieces of gun control legislation were enacted that had a detrimental effect on the firearms industry in general, and MCC's gunsmithing program in particular.

Enrollment declined, Wayne said, as many students weren't sure there would be a future in the industry. During breaks between semesters, Wayne would look for new ways to recruit more students.

The gunsmithing instructors went to various trade shows throughout the year to get the school's name out to the industry. Wayne thought that with National Rifle Association (NRA) backing, there would be an opportunity to attract new students. The college was already offering short-term weekend workshops similar in format to NRA courses. It wasn't a big leap to start an NRA program. Wayne and Jesse discussed going to the NRA convention in Nashville with the objective of approaching them about starting NRA courses.

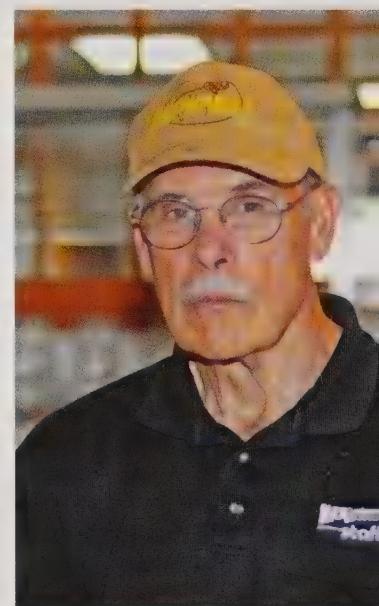
"We planned to impress the NRA enough for us to get their school at MCC," said Jesse. "I spent a lot of time creating our display. I was good at making things; Wayne was good at dealing with the ins and outs," he said. As it turns out, MCC impressed more than the NRA.

Hank Williams Jr. had his own booth at the convention, situated directly across from MCC. He had a display which included his own Gatling gun. Overawed, everyone wanted to talk to Williams, but no one could muster the courage to approach him. Finally, Jesse bribed one of his students with a free dinner if he could get Williams to come over to MCC's booth. The student walked over to Williams and said, "Hank, I've got something over here I want to show you." Williams immediately followed him and began talking shop with Wayne, Jesse and the gunsmithing students.

Whether or not they got the courage to approach the NRA because they'd already cleared a more difficult hurdle with Hank Williams Jr., no one knows. However, Wayne and Jesse did talk with representatives from the NRA, and MCC eventually became the fourth school in the country to get NRA endorsement to offer NRA short-term courses. It was a coup that generated even more attention for the tiny school in Troy.

One advantage of the NRA affiliation was that it allowed the college to obtain nationally and internationally known experts to teach the classes.

"As instructors, we could pick their brains for ways to improve the gunsmithing



program," Wayne said. Other advantages were word-of-mouth advertising and job opportunities. "They [the NRA instructors] would go back home and recommend our school. The program also gave us a way to get jobs for our graduates. Employers would call us for referrals. In some instances they came to take our NRA classes and hired our students because they liked what they saw," Wayne said. One lasting advantage has been that The Friends of the NRA Foundation became financial supporters, providing scholarships annually for Gunsmithing students.

People from all walks of life liked to take NRA classes from professional armorers, to active duty military, to rocket scientists. Wayne recalled when a doctor in aerospace engineering, James Batson, came to take an NRA engraving class. "I liked to tell people we had a rocket scientist taking NRA classes," he said. Batson was retired from the U.S. Army Missile Command and was an avid bladesmith. He earned his master smith rating in 1993 and later taught NRA knife making at MCC.

As the gunsmithing program flourished, so did the metal engraving program. Most metal engraving students were also gunsmithing students. Jesse remembers going to different gun and knife shows where he would display his engraved firearms and knives. It was there that Jesse built relationships with members of the North Carolina Custom Knifemakers Guild. Knifemaking classes were added to the NRA schedule and internationally-known master bladsmiths began coming to MCC to teach bladesmithing.

Jesse eventually took his metal engraving program to the college level and began teaching 2-and-3D design and metallurgy. One year, the students designed and die cast a full-size cannon with the help of the local machinist, Walt Heim. Walt did the machining.

"Walter was a great machinist. He bored out the barrel of the cannon and metal came off and one of the chips wrapped around his finger. He said, 'Walt's finger got cut off!' He had to get a lot of stitches, but it was a good learning experience," Jesse said. The cannon proved to be more trouble than anyone expected. It took a year to build and Walt decided to proof test it on the college's firing range to make sure it passed a form of stress test to determine firearm safety.

"To proof test, you have to overload it with powder so that if it was going to blow up, it would," explained Jesse. "Dr. Hampton was present and he was walking out to where they were building the new pottery building. He said. The pottery building is located immediately above the gunsmithing shop and the firing range. Walt lit the fuse and everyone ran for cover. 'The cannon went off, everyone in the school heard it,' including Dr. Hampton," Jesse said.

"The cannon jumped back about four feet. We were checking a powder keg and Dr. Hampton came running onto the range. 'What happened? Was anyone hurt?' he wanted to know. I guess we scared him because he banned all use of the range after the firing range after that," Jesse said.

Jesse's career as a teacher began when he was in the Marine Corps. He was in the marksmanship training unit. I shot the Western Division of the Marine Corps, which included Marines in the Western United States and Hawaii. I was assigned to the 1st Marine Division School. Instead, they picked me up as a teacher," Jesse said. That's how I got to be a teacher," Jesse said. Later, MCC formed a shooting team and Jesse helped the team hone their competitive shooting skills.

Jesse also taught NRA engraving courses at another NRA school in Oklahoma during his summer breaks, and took knifemaking classes every summer. He engraved all the knives he made, which increased their value.

"I did a Buie knife valued at \$3,000," Jesse said. The most valuable knife he engraved was a Samuel Bell gentlemen's knife. It was valued at \$14,000 by master bladesmith, Jim Batson.

Jesse designed and engraved more than knives and firearms. One year, he designed a Montgomery County commemorative coin that featured several aspects of the county. He made the die, heat treated it, and took it to a forge to be completed. The coins were sequentially numbered and only 300 were made. Later, when the metal engraving program was discontinued for a time, Jesse went to work for East Montgomery High School. While there, he created a larger-than-life size Excalibur sword that he and several others worked on and cast at East Montgomery High School. The sword stood in a 6,000-pound rock outside East Middle School. He also engraved the wooden Eagle logo that is embedded in a rock outside of East High School. Jesse eventually returned to his former position at MCC. When enrollment in the gunsmithing program grew, the metal engraving program was reinstated and Jesse came back to teach it.

Although there were several lean years when the state budget was extremely tight, various firearms' and parts' manufacturers such as Brownells and Midway USA came to the rescue and provided supplies and equipment for the gunsmithing program. Wayne recalls one incident right before the Christmas break when he was getting ready to leave for the holiday.

"I was literally closing the door when the phone rang. I was trying to decide whether to answer it or not. I answered it and it was Pete Brownell. He asked if we would mind if he bought us a new CNC mill. I asked him, 'Is this a trick question?' So then he asked if we could use scholarships. He gave us two \$1,000 scholarships that they've been giving to us ever since. The bad part about it was there was no one around to brag to," Wayne said. "They would also donate boxes of their overstocked supplies. The first time two pallets came from them around Christmas. I wasn't expecting anything and wasn't going to open them up, but the maintenance supervisor talked me into it. We stayed for several hours going through everything they sent and still didn't get done. Whenever we went to the SHOT Show, students went by their booth and thanked them personally for all their help."

When the college's budget was tight, Wayne says he still got a lot of support from the college. "[MCC President] Mary Kirk was always very supportive of the gunsmithing program and one year she paid her own way to represent the college at the SHOT Show. "She was well-known among the donors," Wayne said.

At the 2006 SHOT Show, Midway USA President/CEO, Larry Potterfield, began talking to Wayne and Mary about starting a program that would teach gunsmiths the business side of owning a gun shop. Potterfield secured a total of \$175,000 in grants for the college to get a new hunting and shooting sports management program started. It is now a curriculum degree program within the North Carolina Community College System and is completely unique, offered only at MCC. A few years later, Midway USA would also donate \$125,000 to establish and maintain an arms room that would continuously supply the gunsmithing program with an inventory of firearms with which to teach students.

There were three concurrent gunsmithing programs running by the time Wayne started: one during the day, one in the evening, and one on weekends, and still a two-year waiting list of students who wanted to take gunsmithing. The director of gunsmithing, Mark Dye, was hired to train for Wayne's program. Mark is also an MCC graduate and owned his own gun shop back to MCC.

Gunsmithing program flourished under Wayne's care, but he downplays making it what it is today. "I just feel like I did my job, which was to help me keep my job. Sure, I had to work on promoting it, but the fact that it has grown as much as it has sometimes blows my mind."

Dec. 31, 2015. He still talks frequently with Mark Dye about seeing Mark's progress and I like talking to the students,"

Wayne did some consulting work with Benelli USA and helped with three MCC Gunsmithing graduates. He and his wife live in Charlotte.

Gunsmithing program was reinstated as a weekend program in 2008. Wayne teaches it and is still at MCC. He likes to make one knife a year, takes three-to-four months of work, and he still teaches NRA



# Medical Assisting Programs



**Dena Evans**

Montgomery Community College's medical assisting associate degree program was started in 1994 with its first instructor, Dena Evans, R.N. At the time, there were very few medical assisting programs in North Carolina community colleges.

Dena was working as a home health nurse but felt the call to teach. Although she had never taught before, she applied for the position directing the fledgling medical assisting program at Montgomery Community College.

"I was scared to death," Dena said. "But I saw the position, I applied, and I got it. After I was hired, I remember my boss Virginia Morgan took me to my office. There was a blank desk, a bare bookcase, and I had no clue what I was supposed to do," she said.

One of the first things Dena was charged with was finding clinical sites where students could perform their clinical externships.

"The program was so new, so a lot of my job was getting out in the community and selling the role of medical assistants to the physicians," Dena said. "There weren't a lot of providers in Montgomery County."

She worked with physicians mostly in the Moore County area, but her biggest advocate was Dr. John Woodyear in Montgomery County. Dr. Woodyear had one of the first offices with medical assistants in the county and he served as chairman of the program's advisory committee for many years.

"He put a lot of MCC graduates to work in his office," said Dena.

Since she had never taught before, one of Dena's biggest challenges was learning what to expect from her students.

"I wasn't accustomed to some of the behaviors in the classroom," Dena said. "For example, I would lock the door once class started and students would get upset if they weren't on time and couldn't get into class. I think I spent more time in Mr. Kissell's office that first year than I did in my own office," she said. Students would complain about Dena to V.P. of Student Services, Phil Kissell, and Phil would coach Dena on dealing with students on an individual basis.

So, when a student brought her baby to the medical assisting lab one day, Dena didn't say anything to the student. "Not until she changed the baby's diaper in the back of the lab. I knew there had to be something wrong with that," she said.

At the same time Dena was learning her way around the classroom, the college embarked on obtaining accreditation for the medical assisting program. "It was the framework for the program because graduates couldn't sit for the Certified Medical Assistant exam unless the program was accredited," Dena explained.

Dena worked on an in-depth self-study requiring hours of work outside the classroom. The study was designed to reveal any shortcomings in the program that needed to be corrected before the accrediting agency made a site visit.

MCC's medical assisting program was accredited in April 1998 and soon afterwards Dena moved on to take a position closer to home at Richmond Community College. While there, she took RCC's medical assisting program through its accreditation process.

Since working at MCC, Dena went back to school to get her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, then her Master in Public Health from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2000. She chaired Richmond Community College's health sciences division and began working on her Doctorate in Education from N.C. State, which she received in 2010. In 2006 she took a position as associate professor in the School of Nursing at UNC-Pembroke where she taught graduate and undergraduate nursing classes for nine years. She went back to UNC-Chapel Hill to earn her Masters in Nursing in 2014 when Board of Nursing requirements changed for nursing instructors. Dr. Evans is currently associate professor and interim director of the School of Nursing at UNC-Charlotte.

Dena said of Montgomery Community College, "I enjoyed my time there and love the college and miss it. It's very different from the university. I miss the family atmosphere. Everyone at MCC is family," she said.

Dena Evans was followed by Certified Medical Assistant (AAMA) Cyndi Caviness, as director of the medical assisting program. Cyndi came to MCC in August of 1998. Although the medical assisting program was accredited in April that year, there were several recommendations that came out of the site visit that needed to be addressed. Like Dena, Cyndi hit the ground running and was soon immersed in researching and collecting the documentation required to meet accreditation standards.

"I jumped in with both feet. I immediately started working on accreditation. I had great mentors in Debbie Barberousse (Director Institutional Effectiveness), Phil Kissell and



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**Christy Freeman**

Bruce Turner. Mrs. Barberousse held my hand through the whole thing," Cyndi said. Five years after the initial site visit, CAAHEP (Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs) paid another visit and reaffirmed the program's accreditation.

Cyndi was a critical care respiratory therapist for 23 years before going back to school to get her degree in medical assisting. After graduating, she went to work for a surgeon. One of her former instructors asked her to teach a night class at Central Carolina Community College. That's where Cyndi discovered that she liked teaching. When she learned that a medical assisting program director was needed at MCC, Cyndi decided to take a chance at teaching full-time, and it paid off.

For the past 19 years, Cyndi has taken the program to outstanding levels. With a job placement average of over 87 percent, and an employer satisfaction with MCC graduates of 100 percent, these outcomes exceed standards for accreditation.

Today, MCC medical assisting graduates can be found in doctor's offices all around Montgomery County. One of Cyndi's first graduates is Christy (Robinson) Freeman who works at Troy Medical Services.

Christy quit high school to get married and raise a family. She worked in a mill but decided she wanted a change when mills began closing around the county. Her first step was to go back to school to get her GED at Montgomery Community College. While at MCC, she noticed the medical assisting students walking by with their scrub uniforms on so she asked their instructor about them.

"Mrs. Caviness told me about what medical assistants do. I liked the idea of helping people but I didn't want to do nursing because I wanted regular work hours," Christy said. She learned that most medical assistants work in physician's offices so she could, for the most part, keep regular hours. Christy was awarded her GED in May and started her medical assisting associate degree in August of 2003.

"I had never heard of medical assisting before. I saw the curriculum and it sounded like it would be a good fit for me. I was scared to death. I had been out of school for a long time, but there were other people in the class that were about my age. I found out everyone was scared," Christy said.

Once Christy started, her doubts vanished. She got involved with student organizations and began a work-study job with the nursing department.

"Mrs. Caviness was always very good to me," Christy said. "My mom was a nurse and I was going to school and she brought me to the hospital when I got sick. She would call my husband to come and get me." These are types of things that Mrs. Caviness did for her members, not teachers. But MCC was known for turning students into exceptions to the rule.

Christy remembers having to do some things well outside of her comfort zone as a student. "In anatomy and physiology we were working on balance - sensory somatosensory or other. I had to stand on one foot with my eyes closed feeling like an idiot. I also remember grabbing people out in the halls to do blood pressures. We had to do things on people besides our fellow students to do them on. Later, when we learned to do EKG tests, we did them on a hot dog weenie," Christy said.

Christy also became the guinea pig when her classmates had to learn how to draw veins from patients. "I got stuck a lot. I had good veins," she said.

Christy performed her externship at Mid Carolina Family Medical Center, where many MCC medical assisting graduates now work. She was hired there via an interview from MCC in 2005. She is now a certified medical assistant (AAMA).

Christy describes her time at MCC positively. "There was a lot of camaraderie," she said.



Cyndi Caviness

"I made friendships during classes," she said. "A lot of us stayed in touch after graduating. Mrs. Caviness was a really good instructor. I try to treat people the way I want to be treated, and I want people to treat me across to us."

Christy is currently employed at Troy Medical Services where she has worked for the past 15 years.

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# The Debbies

## Nursing Program

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### **Deborah Morton**

Deborah Morton RN BSN, led the Practical Nursing Program at MCC as a full time instructor for 30 years and continued to work part time for eight additional years. "I loved my work at MCC. We had a family atmosphere among the faculty and staff and the focus was on the students," Deborah said. "It was just understood that the students came first and the students knew it. And, they appreciated it." Deborah said she never minded going to work, but amended that to say maybe she wasn't real happy about getting up at 3:30 a.m. during clinicals, when she had to get to the hospital ahead of the students to evaluate the patients and make student assignments – but that was a necessary part of the job, she added. Deborah came to work at MTI (Montgomery Technical Institute) in 1973, two years after Marvin Miles became president and continued through the next three presidents – Dr. Benny Hampton, Dr. Ted Gasper and Dr. Mary Kirk – and Bruce Turner's two appointments as interim president. She worked through the transitions of name changes – to MTC (Montgomery Technical College) in 1983 and MCC (Montgomery Community College) in 1987 – and the schedule and technology changes. "The hardest transition was keeping up with technology, using computers and digital record keeping," she said, "but the basic nursing principle, working hands-on taking care of the patients, never changes." Deborah was working on the medical surgery floor at Stanly County Hospital, where MTI students did their clinical training, when instructors Meg Sinclair and Nancy Bost asked her if she had ever considered teaching. "Meg was an OB (obstetrics) instructor and Nancy's specialty was pediatrics. They needed someone to teach medical surgical nursing," Deborah said. "I had not, but I thought, I will never know until I try." She applied, began working and found that teaching and training nurses was her calling. Deborah started teaching with Meg Sinclair at MTI's first home in what is now the county schools administration building on Page Street in Troy and moved into well-equipped classrooms in the first permanent home on the new campus in 1977. When she started, the Nursing Program had 12 students, she recalled, but enrollment quickly and steadily went to average 30 students a year. Employment was not then, nor is it now, an issue for LPN graduates. Job offers before graduation was not unusual and graduates went right into a job. After Meg Sinclair retired in 1976, Deborah Hunsucker joined Deborah Morton as the second nursing instructor. They became synonymous with nursing as "the two Debbies" for nearly 12 years. When Debbie Hunsucker had to retire for medical disability, Eva Cook joined the staff. Lynne Hancock, who just recently retired, joined the team in 1990. Deborah never moved far away from home. She was born and raised in Stanly County, graduated from South Stanly High School and earned her RN BSN degree from UNC Charlotte. After she married, she moved seven miles away to Norwood, where she still lives.

The Practical Nurse Program at MTI had been accredited in 1970 by the State Board of Nursing. The first instructor, Shirley Jenkins, who now lives in Biscoe, had set high standards for the program. The Practical Nurse curriculum, standards and policies are under the State Board of Nursing rules, which take precedence over college policies. Several times over the past 50 years, conflicts with college policy have arisen, but have always been resolved. MCC has the distinction of over 90 percent of its graduates passing the state board examination. Passing the state exam earns the practical nurse a license as an LPN. In her 30-plus years, Deborah touched the lives of nearly 1,000 students who came through her program. Some of her early graduates had retired before she did, but she is still in contact with several who are still working. Vickie Barbour graduated from MTI, went on to earn her BSN degree and taught part time in the program. "I love going to a doctor and seeing a former student still working," she said. "It is heartwarming to hear from former students years after they graduated who get in touch to say thanks for their training and how much they appreciated us." Many graduates continued their education in medicine to become Registered Nurses, Emergency Medical Technicians and hospital technicians in areas such as radiology. One young man, Deborah recalls, went on to be an anesthesiologist. After the first male student, men in the classroom were not unusual and most of them went on to become RNs. "Practical nursing is a good beginning for many other careers, but most of the students just wanted to be a nurse, went to work after graduation and stayed with their career," she said. The students who stood out to Deborah were not always the "A" students, but the "B" students who had the care and compassion to be a good nurse and who enjoyed working with the patients. "A second instructor was always necessary for us to meet the Board of Nursing Rules that dictated a maximum of 10 students per instructor in the clinical setting," Deborah said. "Also, we needed a second classroom instructor. Everybody has different specialties, so we teach in the areas of our own specialties. We had a lot of part time instructors in different specialties to assure our students of a comprehensive education." Deborah enjoys the MCC Retirees Lunch every other month in Troy to renew those lasting friendships they have all treasured over the years. Deborah loves seeing them now and especially Peggy Brewer, Bruce Turner, Kathy Harris and Phil Kissell. "Phil was our connection to the rest of the college. When we needed anything for our program, we went to Phil first. He always told us to remember that we knew our program and he didn't, so just ask for what we needed." "That kind of mutual trust and respect was the way the college staff operated. That's what made us such good friends and a close work family," she said. Deborah and her husband, Jerry, have three adult children and four "beautiful grandchildren." Since Jerry retired, they enjoy taking short trips together and are active in their church, Silver Springs Baptist Church.

### **Deborah Hunsucker**

Debbie graduated from UNC G with an RN BSN degree in 1975, got married, and went to work at Montgomery Memorial Hospital in Troy. When she learned that Meg Sinclair was leaving the Nursing Program at MTI, she applied and went to the college in January 1976.

She and Deborah Morton were the nursing program team of "the two Debbies" until she was forced into disability retirement in 1987.



**“The Debbies”**: Nursing

Surgery on both knees and her back took away the two physical abilities that Debbie Hunsucker had. She has to use a walker, but stays busy cooking, reading and enjoying the company of her family.

Debbie said she was at MTI at the best possible time. “I was there when it was a small college and we were like a family,” she said. “Everybody was willing to sit down and talk to you.” Debbie worked in the Business Department, but she would take care of you anyway.” Debbie said. “I worked in the bookstore with Peggy Brewer in the bookstore. “Jim Ray (General Education teacher) kept his fingers crossed for me. “It was a better place because he was there,” Debbie said. “Phil and Barbara (Hunsucker) and their daughter, Heather, and our son, Wesley, were born so we could have a crib upstairs and not have to go down the stairs.” Debbie moved to her beloved Ophir Community. Barbara Kissell met her future husband, Phil, at MTI. Debbie and Phil got married at MTI. She is still working at a clinic in Pinehurst. Debbie said the surprise of her life was that her daughter, Heather, decided to become an LPN. She graduated from MCC and worked at a hospital in Asheboro before joining the staff of an Asheboro physician. Not many people know that Bob Qualls, a professional, no-nonsense instructor in the Criminal Justice program, was also a practical joker. Debbie never laughed so hard as the time Bob sent the Early Childhood instructor into near hysterics by putting tobacco and very carefully fashioned dozens of little balls that looked like mouse droppings on the desks and in the drawers. “Who would have thought Bob would do that?” she said. Debbie and Phil became close friends with Mary Chesson, General Education teacher, and her husband, Boon. Two of the hundreds of students she taught stand out for Debbie. Jane York was almost 60 when she went to the Nursing Program. “She was everybody’s grandmother. We all loved Jane. She became an excellent nurse and worked for many years,” Debbie said. “She had those attributes of compassion, empathy and a desire to help others that are essential to becoming a great nurse.” And, there was a really intelligent student from Randolph County who later continued to earn her RN degree. “I could tell she really didn’t like me, but that was ok because I was there to teach and she was there to learn,” Debbie said. “Ten years after she graduated from MTI, this former student came to see me to tell me how much she appreciated me. She acknowledged that she hadn’t liked me much at MTI, but came to appreciate me while in RN school. She said I had taught her more about obstetrics than RN classes even touched on and she wanted me to know how much she had come to appreciate me. That touches a teacher’s heart.” Obstetrics was Debbie’s specialty. “I loved nursing and I loved teaching. My years at MTI were wonderful years and I do miss the classroom and the friendships among the faculty and staff, but we have to accept the changes life brings and find joy in our new circumstances.”

**and Debbie Hunsucker**

for hours and lift, calls “the light of

Debbie knew everybody well. She could count on Doris Haywood, the Continuing Education coordinator, Purchasing and Supply, and Phil, well, MTI was a good place to raise a family. Debbie’s daughter, Heather, is now 25 and still lives in the area. Debbie graduated from the Nursing Program in 1968. She has her own daughter, Heather, now 25, for five years. Debbie is a consummate professional. She said she had a good time at MTI. Bob had taken her to the beach and put them on her back. Debbie and Phil are now married. Debbie’s husband, Mickey, is a retired police officer.

*“That kind of mutual trust and respect was the way the college staff operated. That’s what made us such good friends and a close work family,”*

# Shirley Jenkins

## Staff

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In September 1968, Shirley Jenkins began the practical nursing program at Montgomery Technical Institute.

"The first day, I saw a big, empty room and wondered if this was what I went through all those years of training and college for," Shirley can laugh at the memory now. Then she went to work on the first requirement, approval from the N.C. Nursing Board. In addition to a classroom, the room had to be set up like a hospital room. As all MTI employees did in the early years, Decatur Jones, personnel director who had recruited Shirley, searched for equipment. He found what Shirley called "old and ugly hand-me-downs" from other colleges, but they made it work.

Meanwhile, Shirley was writing the curriculum for a one-year practical nurse program according to the N.C. Nurse Practice Act, which had been enacted in 1903 "to regulate the practice of Nursing in North Carolina and guides the work of the Board of Nursing to protect the patients of North Carolina."

In the years that followed, she would build the program into a model for community colleges and see all the students who graduated from her program pass the state board exams. Gov. Bob Scott asked her to serve on the N.C. Board of Nursing, which was a great responsibility. The Board of Nursing supervises the licenses of licensed practical nurses and registered nurses, addresses issues and renews and reinstates licenses. The board also supervises the Nurse Aide II listing and the Approvals to Practice for Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Midwives, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists and Clinical Nurse Specialists.

When the Jenkins family moved to Montgomery County, Shirley cried all the way from Charlotte to Biscoe. They knew that her pharmacist husband, Ingram, would eventually come back home to help at the Biscoe Drug Store, founded by his father many years before. They just didn't know when.

Shirley had to give up a nursing instructor job at Central Piedmont Community College and didn't know where this new phase of their lives would take her career. "Now, I am so happy things happened as they did, because we got to raise our two precious boys here," she said. Butch and Jimmy were pre-schoolers then, but both are successful attorneys now.

It wasn't long after they moved to Biscoe that Decatur Jones contacted Shirley about starting a nursing program at MTI. They needed someone qualified by the N.C. Nursing Board. Shirley took on the challenge and starting with that "big empty room," worked all summer to be ready for the first class in the fall of 1968.

"It was so exciting to be part of a new institution and working with the administrators and other new instructors as we wrote our curriculums and set up our programs," she said. "I can't remember every one, but among them were Bruce and Ellen Turner, Phil Kissell, Decatur and Virginia Jones and Judy Miller. Everybody there was kind and supportive. We helped each other and we were all dedicated to the success of the school. Shirley interviewed applicants for that first class, whom she remembers as "so eager to be accepted, they were nervous wrecks. That's how badly they wanted it."

She soon found that she was not only their instructor, but their confidant and best friend. To instill in the students the degree of professionalism and dedication they needed, she used her number one nursing skill - observation. That means she didn't - and still doesn't - miss a detail. When some didn't have money for books, the books appeared. She also bought many a lunch when someone didn't have money. "They were so dedicated and eager to learn, I couldn't let one drop out over a few dollars," she said. "I also observed some who had difficulty getting clothes to wear to class." Shirley's solution: Order each student two uniforms to wear to class with the explanation the white uniforms gave them a professional appearance to match their professional attitude. Whatever they needed, Shirley got it for them.

Because Montgomery Memorial Hospital didn't have the variety of ailments and disorders students were required to learn, the Board of Nursing would not approve it for clinical experience. Stanly Regional Hospital in Albemarle was approved. Shirley got up at 4 a.m. three days a week to be there in time to match each student with the patient whose disorder matched what they were studying in the classroom. Shirley taught them to be observant and, when they walked down the hall, to mentally name the patient, the disorder, medication and treatment. Shirley said the staff at Stanly Hospital

was great and she could not recall a day missed by a student.

With the first class, Shirley began the tradition of a special graduation ceremony at Trinity United Methodist Church in Troy. There was a medical professional speaker and students carried bouquets of red roses and took the nurses' oath. "When that first class sang 'The Impossible Dream,' you could feel their pride and their families' pride fill up the room. There wasn't a dry eye in the church." Every practical nurse student works hard for that license. "People don't realize how valuable a nursing license is and how much hard work goes into earning one," she said. "You don't get to put LPN or RN after your name until you pass the state board exams." The exams are delivered to the test site in Raleigh in an armored truck and exams are strictly monitored. Students have to pass all five parts of the exam to earn the "licensed" title. Shirley loved teaching as much as she loved her students. Her enthusiasm for sharing the basic skills of nursing care and how the body systems work so closely together for the body to function, was contagious. "I loved teaching anatomy and physiology and they loved learning," she said. "They learned the basic skills of nursing in the nursing lab. They also learned about diseases, treatments and surgical procedures, pediatrics, obstetrics, geriatrics, pharmacology and the uses and uses of drugs, and, the least favorite subject was nutrition."

At Mercy School of Nursing where Shirley earned her RN license, the motto was begin that nurses are angels of mercy and her goal was for every nurse who graduated from MCC to believe that, to have respect for every patient, family member and medical student. "I want to remember that God left our hearing as our last sense."

Shirley never let a patient die without whispering The Lord's Prayer in their ear, knowing that each had heard it. Shirley, a Gaston County native, had earned her associate degree at Mercy School of Nursing in Charlotte and her associate in science degree at the former Heart Junior College. Before classes started at Mercy, she took Latin and science classes at Gardner-Webb University. Then she graduated from Queens College in Charlotte with a bachelor's degree in science. "I went to Catholic, Baptist and Presbyterian schools and God was the same at all of them," she said. "I believe that God had a purpose for me to help other people and led me to where I was supposed to be. I believe the nursing profession was chosen for me before I was born."

Shirley was a miracle baby. She weighed one-pound at birth, but grew up to be a tall, skinny blonde, a perfectionist, an overachiever and a dedicated nurse. A nurse at the former Mercy Hospital introduced her and the young pharmacist, Ingram Jenkins, to each other for four years because nursing students were not allowed to be married.

Their two sons were born in Charlotte while Shirley was continuing her education. Now she looks back at those times as preparation for their lives to come to Montgomery County, where they have made hundreds of friends and touched the lives of hundreds. Biscoe Drug Store closed when Ingram retired, but people still remember the cherry smash that he and his dad made.

Shirley was the first to volunteer for a committee that helped better the lives of Montgomery County residents. She raised thousands of dollars for the schools, for the medical building and many other projects, including the flag that waves in front of Biscoe Municipal building. She has anonymously paid bills and provided food and clothing numerous times when she heard of a need.

Shirley has a closet full of plaques and certificates, but the most treasured are from her nursing classes and individual students. One that stands out is a framed artistic tribute from an LPN graduate which says, "A nurse who touches a life was first touched by a nurse educator." "No one will ever know how much I loved my students. MCC has given so many an opportunity that they would never have had," she said. "And, it was because of our God giving me the ability to teach nursing to these wonderful people so they could become the angels of mercy that they are."



*\*Shirley was especially proud of two young men from Troy, the Butler brothers. She and the MCC Public Relations office (910-898-6004) would like to contact them or a member of their family for an interview. Shirley remembers that one joined the U.S. Marine Corps immediately after graduation as he had planned and the other went to work for a prominent urologist in Albemarle.*

## *How to teach with two broken wrists*

*The story of Shirley Jenkins never missing a class while she had two broken wrists is legendary at MCC. She was the faculty member in charge of the SGA (Student Government Association) Christmas Party at the Montgomery Country Club one year. The food was catered and the SGA did all the decorations, so her job was mostly to monitor for alcohol, which was not allowed.*

*The students wanted to put talcum powder on the dance floor and Shirley said sure, go ahead. "I was dancing with Ingram when my heel slid forward on the powder and I fell backward and caught myself with both hands on the floor," she said. Ingram said he had made a turn and when he turned around, he was dancing with Jesse Capel, trustee chairman, and looked down to see Shirley on the floor.*

*Shirley and Ingram left the party quietly and went to Montgomery Memorial Hospital where Dr. Charles Highsmith set her arm. "I was in casts for six weeks, but I never missed a class. My darling husband had to do everything for the next six weeks. He would help me get dressed and drive me to school. The students were so good. They got my coffee with a straw in it and helped me with personal needs," she said. "He never asked for a substitute, she said, because a substitute might miss an important point that might be on the board exam.*

## *Credit where credit is due*

*Shirley Jenkins wants to make a tribute to J.F. Allen, whom she gives credit for bringing a technical institute, now Montgomery Community College, to Montgomery County. "Mr. Allen was a member of the original board of trustees and served for 30 years," she said. Mr. Allen was elected to the N.C. Senate in 1966 and served one term before he was appointed N.C. Highway Commissioner. "I want to thank Mr. Allen for his part in meeting our educational needs," she said.*

# Taxideremy Programs



**David Williams**

"What I remember about the taxidermy approval, just like with gunsmithing was, is where will we find an instructor?" said Blake.

After a thorough search, in September 1977 the first taxidermy class was taught at MTI by licensed taxidermist and animal lover, Billy Wayne Murchison. Murchison was known for keeping a homemade zoo on his property north of Troy where he had bears, monkeys, lions, baboons, deer, goats and exotic birds. He would send his students to his home to study his animals before beginning a taxidermy project.

"Bill got the program set up and running. We had full classes of students and soon offered day and night classes," Blake recalled.

"When Murchison left, Joe Gill, an outstanding student about to graduate was hired to take over the program. He was a good taxidermist and a good teacher," he said.

Gill joined the program in June 1981. A wildlife conservationist originally from Florida, Gill brought an artistic side to his teaching.

MTI produced some of the best taxidermists in the business. Beginning under Gill's direction, students entered competitions. Soon, display cabinets were full of incredible artistic scenes featuring their mounted specimens, all with show-winning ribbons.

In 1983, Gill was appointed to the Chairman's Wildlife Advisory Committee of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and was presented an award for his conservation efforts. He taught day and night classes until March 1984 and continued to teach day classes until May 1986.

James "David" Williams was the full-time taxidermy instructor after Gill. He was hired to teach part time in the evening taxidermy class in 1984, and began to teach full-time day classes when Gill left in 1986.

Williams was a native of Buncombe County. He joined the U.S. Air Force in 1962 and served tours of duty in Vietnam. After joining the service he practiced taxidermy part time as a hobby. As he was stationed in many different parts of the world during his career, he had the opportunity to mount a wide variety of game animals and fish. A six-year term in Alaska became the catalyst for his decision to make a career of taxidermy. While there, he mounted Dall sheep, black bear, mountain sheep, and Alaskan brown bear. Upon his retirement from military service in 1982, he enrolled in MTI's taxidermy program and graduated in 1983. He opened his own business, Superior Taxidermy Studio in Robbins and began teaching taxidermy part time for Montgomery Technical College in 1984.

Gene Anderson, gunsmithing instructor and Williams' friend recalls a wildlife agent who was a student, bringing an alligator for Williams's class to mount. He saved the meat from the tail which Williams cooked and invited the gunsmithing students to eat.

"It was delicious," said Anderson.

Gill was one whose contribution to a meal was not so appetizing. "He brought a whole possum with an apple in its mouth," Anderson recalls. Blake said someone commented that it couldn't be a possum because there were no tire tracks.

"Some people tasted it, I think, but most of us couldn't get past the apple in its mouth," said Talbert Myers, former vice president of continuing education.

Williams retired from MCC in August of 2000. He passed away in 2011 at the age of 70. He is survived by his wife Diane who was MCC's librarian at the time David was teaching.

Ted Blake was dean of instruction at MTI when the concept of a taxidermy program first took root.

"We thought taxidermy would be another natural program for our rural, hunting and fishing county. Bruce (Turner) had mentioned the idea to the sportsmen who thought it was a great idea," said Blake.

Ted, Bruce and Mary Anderson, who was public information officer at the time, set about formally interviewing people, collecting signatures of supporters and getting the application written for the Department of Community Colleges (NCDCC).

"One of the requirements for a new program is to show the need and community support. We were gratified when dozens of sportsmen and prospective students showed up to an interest meeting," said Anderson.

"An application for a new program is long and involves a lot of education jargon, but we got it written with every 'I' dotted and every 'T' crossed. The NCDCC approved it," she said.

"We had no problem getting the program approved. The success of gunsmithing and other programs had established MTI as an innovator in unique programming," said Blake. Looking back at the history of MCC, Blake said it was the most innovative school in the community college system.

"We had to be to survive, and our instincts on programs were right. Those were exciting times," he said.



**Joe Gill**

Many of their co-workers remember watching the friendship grow between David and Diane, and they eventually married.

"They were a great couple, good for each other," said Gene.

Mike Gillis was a taxidermy student who became an instructor and that opened the door to a career with a national company that had many doors to be opened for him in his 40-year career. He is a success on many levels and credits MCC with opening that first door.

"I took the two-year night class under Bill Murchison. I started teaching the night class in 1986 when David Williams was the lead instructor. I admired David. He was so talented and such a good person," Gillis said.

Gillis had opened a taxidermy business in Troy where he worked full-time during the day and taught in the evenings.

"Working at MCC was fun for me. I really enjoyed it. I got to meet a lot of good people and had a lot of good times there," Gillis said.

Gillis' unfortunate "claim to fame" as an instructor was the fact that he kept "pet" rattlesnakes.

"Yep, that was me," he said. "I like snakes and I kept some in my shop."

"One bit him and kept him in the hospital for two weeks," said Turner.

Gillis and Williams encouraged their students to showcase their artistic talents, not only in their taxidermy mounts, but in natural scenes in which to display them.

The taxidermy classes were always full, Gillis recalls. Like any other trade, everyone had his or her own reason for learning it.

"Some went into business for themselves and were very successful. Others just wanted a little shop to work as a hobby and others just wanted to know how to mount their own trophies," Gillis said.

Gillis said the most talented student he taught, by far, was Chris Barnhardt, with whom he remained close friends.

"Chris was a gifted artist and the ultimate taxidermist. He opened his own business in Concord and gained a national reputation. As a Master Taxidermist, he was a judge in competitions. Unfortunately, Chris passed away 2013."

"We (Gillis and Williams) encouraged our students to join the professional associations and enter shows. We had a lot of blue ribbons on the cases we set up in the halls to display the prize-winning works," Gillis said.

Leading by example, Gillis was a member of the N.C. Taxidermy Association and entered many shows. That is how the offer from McKenzie Taxidermy Supply came about.

"In 1992, Mr. McKenzie offered me a job opportunity that I couldn't turn down," Gillis said. "I believe, and I tell my grandchildren now, that the purpose of an education is to learn and to keep learning, to be ready when the next door opens for you. MCC gave me that opportunity."

Gillis loves his job. He still lives in Troy, but travels extensively all over the country, still meeting a "lot of good people" in the taxidermy profession.

In 1999, another gifted MCC Taxidermy graduate took over the program when Williams retired. Billy Adams brought a different aspect to the program in that he was a former physical science instructor at Asheboro High School.

"My focus was on the chemistry and the 'why' the students were doing certain things to their mounts," said Adams.

Adams and his new wife Liz decided to change their life's direction and learn something they could do together. They decided on taxidermy. After Adams graduated he taught at an alternative school for five years and did taxidermy on the side. When he was approached by someone at MCC who recommended he apply to teach taxidermy, he did.

Adams said he was always first and foremost a teacher, and then a taxidermist. His interest was in the people who became his students. He also wanted to teach them the best skills with an artistic presentation to represent the spirit of the animal.

When Adams came into the program he said it was very male-oriented. The longer he taught, the more women came into the program and the more artistic the presentations became. But the best thing about his job, Adams said, was the diversity of people who came to take taxidermy.

"I taught the little Filipino lady who knew every song on Rock 92 and former Marine snipers that had seen a lot of stuff. Our little college did more than teach subjects. A lot of people came in with baggage and just needed a safe place where they could come and re-acclimate," Adams said.

"I taught people from all over the state and about six other states while I was there. They would be thrown together for a year and would learn all about each other. It wasn't so much learning new skills as the greater satisfaction they got making friends and sometimes finding peace," he said.

Adams left MCC in 2016 and was replaced by Andy Speer. Speer had been teaching evening classes since 2007 and as of this date is currently still teaching taxidermy full time.



**Mike Gillis**



**Bill Murchison**



**Billy Adams**

# Vocational Programs

## Grady Goforth



Grady Goforth career in electronics was a casualty of the “computer age.” He taught his expertise in radio and TV repair until that field of work became obsolete when radios and TVs became disposable items. Battery radios were replaced by transistors and tube TVs were replaced by solid state operating systems. People no longer needed radio or TV repair service and the careers in technology took a totally different direction. That was all within the 50 year history of Montgomery Community College where, in the 1970s, computers replaced electric typewriters, calculators, and most office machines. All employees were retrained to use the new technology. When Grady had his own repair shop, he recalls that when someone bought a new TV set, you could count on seeing them in about 90 days for a new tube. That was its lifespan. “Small appliance repair suffered the same fate. It became cheaper to buy a new appliance than to repair the old one. Parts were no longer available,” he said. Grady was a valuable employee at Montgomery Technical Institute. He was a teacher and a leader, so he transitioned into other positions. He directed the Learning Lab for five years, was Evening Coordinator “for quite a few years,” and taught other vocational classes, on campus and at the Montgomery Corrections facility. The offset press, purchased early on by Chuck Marsh and operated by Pat Brady and Jane Hancock to produce brochures and schedules, had become a full time job. As the college hit a growth spurt, the workloads for Pat and Jane in their own departments grew. More classes meant more teachers and that meant more printed material, such as syllabi, instruction sheets, tests and announcements. Technology was expensive and using a copier cost more per page than printing. With encouragement from Sherrill Lowder, administrator with vocational programs, Grady went to Anson Technical College to earn an associate degree in printing. “We were often printing full color brochures. At first, I would have to get Harris Printing in to make the metal plates, which delayed the process. Then we finally got our own metal plates and could print full color,” he said. Along with all the early employees, Grady believed in what MTI was doing, its value to the county and the opportunity for all the citizens to improve their lives through education.

Grady has fond memories of working with the late Ray Kimrey and Buck Frye, and Bleece Jordan, Jim Thomas, welding instructor Marvin Hancock, Business Manager Ed Jenkins, Director of the Learning Resources Center Gay Russell, Grace Reynolds, Sarah Carpenter and English instructor Mary Chesson, who came out of retirement to serve as interim president between Dr. Ted Gasper and Dr. Mary Kirk. “Mary Chesson taught English and I really enjoyed her classes,” Grady said. “We were a close bunch at MTI. Everybody worked together because we wanted the school and every student to succeed. We did whatever we could to make that happen,” he said. “MCC has been a blessing to Montgomery County.” Grady’s wife, Alvis, had dropped out of school when she was needed to work full time on her family’s farm. While Grady was heading the Learning Lab, Alvis decided she wanted to get her GED. Jack Crawford, director of the Learning Resource Center, told Grady to treat her like any other student and Jack would administer the series of five tests, which she passed with high marks. Grady had graduated from Mt. Gildead High School in 1952 and served three years in the U.S. Army, mostly at Ft. Knox, Kentucky with an army security unit. Back home, his first job was at Farmer’s Implement Co. and then Western Auto. He had started working on radios and television sets with Jack Gathings in 1961 and knew that was what he wanted to do. “About the only place you could get classroom and hands-on lab experience back then was at DeVry Institute in Chicago,” Grady said. “Alvis and I had got married and had our first baby, Dale. We all packed up and moved to Chicago for a year while I got my certification.” Back home again, Grady opened his own business. Then one day, Ted Blake, Dean of Instruction at MTI, walked into Grady’s shop and asked if he would be interested in teaching his trade at MTI because the college was trying to set up a program. Meanwhile, Grady taught at Richmond Technical Institute for several weeks while their instructor was on leave. Grady started his program in the old annex building a year before MTI moved into its permanent campus. He worked through presidents Miles, Benny Hampton, interim president Bruce Turner and retired during the tenure of Ted Gasper. Grady and Alvis had five children and now enjoy eight grandsons and a great granddaughter. He and Buck Frye were Boy Scout leaders from the times their sons were little Cub Scout and led many Montgomery County Scout, including their sons, through Eagle Scout ceremonies. Grady went to Philmont National Boy Scout Jamborees four times. After he retired from MCC, he served as a Boy Scouts District Executive for five years.

His latest project was what he calls his “graveyard book.” He has researched and documented the graves in all the cemeteries in Montgomery County, including the “forgotten and neglected” sites.

## Buck Frye

Lacy “Buck” Verlin Frye was a respected and admired auto mechanics instructor at Montgomery Technical Institute and a role model for hundreds of young men as a Boy Scout leader. Buck died on Oct. 30, 2015 at age 83.

Former students and Boy Scouts paid tribute to him as a man of kind words and an encourager, one who led by example. Buck served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force and opened auto mechanics shop when he returned home. He taught at Montgomery Technical Institute from April 1981 until August 1989 and continued teaching several more years in the auto mechanics program at Sandhills Community College.

For many years, Buck was a lay speaker in the United Methodist Church. After he retired in the early 1990s, he attended Duke University Divinity School for a year to be certified in the ministry. He served several churches in



Montgomery County. He was a Boy Scout Leader for 29 years and a member of Biscoe Masonic Lodge. Buck and his wife, Marjorie, were instrumental in establishing the community food pantry in Biscoe, which was dedicated to them as the "Buck and Marjorie Frye Community Building. His daughter-in-law, Karen, is Enrollment Coordinator at MCC.

### Gurney Bleece Jordan

When Bleece Jordan was stationed at the Pentagon during his U.S. Air Force career, he would look at his windowless office walls and vow that when he retired, he would have a place in the country with a stream running through it. He does and he loves it, especially now that he has retired again from Montgomery Community College where he taught auto mechanics for 21 years.

The auto mechanics program at community colleges declined as manufacturers began to put computers in cars. "Technology changed the way we had to diagnose problems. Empathy and lack of financial support in the community college system led to programs closing. The shop equipment was very expensive. That was also a problem for a graduate who wanted his own business - the equipment required to run a shop was more than a small business could afford," Bleece said.

MTI kept its program going longer than most with the purchase of a front-end alignment machine and a Sun Interrogator, a computer-based diagnostic system.

They were costly, Bleece said. The manufacturer trained the instructors. When he was nearing retirement, Bleece was on disability for a year, but still worked on the computers one or two days a week. There also came a time when the focus of the community college system changed from trades to academics. That was great, but there was still a need for skilled craftsmen. "I was hearing from industry that they needed welders, electricians and mechanics. Students in the trades had to buy their own tools and equipment, which a lot of them couldn't afford," Bleece said. MTI graduates did well and those who were serious about their work were placed in jobs ahead of graduates of other technical colleges, Bleece said. They went to work for dealerships and quite a few were hired by NASCAR related shops, such as Tex Racing, which began in Montgomery County. Bleece himself is an auto mechanics at MTI success story. He had always had a thing for cars, so when he retired from the USAF and found his place in the country with a stream, he enrolled in the program. Jack Caldwell and Milas Haywood were his instructors. Milas was nearing retirement and Bleece was hired to teach. He started at the original MTI site, the renovated auto dealership building in Troy known as "the annex," and kept teaching for 21 years. Bleece was right at home. He had grown up in the Allreds community and graduated from Star High School. He met his wife, Leslie, when she was his sister's English nanny. Leslie got her General Education degree from MTI with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. Bleece said the quality of life in Montgomery County was the reason they moved back after his military career. That's the same reason MTI was able to attract and retain talented instructors and administrators, he said. Ricky Williams was teaching auto body repair. Mike Anderson was teaching air-conditioning and refrigeration. Pat Brady and Kathy Harris were there for the students. Gene Anderson, Wayne Bernauer and Walt Heim taught gunsmithing. "In spite of never having enough funding, we all worked our butts off. We were all in the same boat and did whatever we could for our students and for each other," Bleece said. "We put the county on the map in a lot of ways," Bleece said. MTI, through its name changes to Montgomery Technical College to Montgomery Community College, changed a lot of lives in a very positive way. Their son Dale now lives in Ft. Lauderdale where he works for a major IT company. They are mourning the death of their son, Rick, a successful business man who had a fatal heart attack in March.

Bleece and Leslie both have health issues and have adjusted their activities and the size of their garden accordingly. They enjoy the deer and other wildlife that play on their place in the country with the stream running through it. Breakout Box One of Bleece's favorite stories from his teaching career is the student from Mt. Gilead who drove "one of those really big, long Cadillacs." On his way home one day, the transmission on the Caddy went out in Wadeville. "The only gear he had was reverse, so he backed that long Caddy from Wadeville to Mt. Gilead, over five miles," Bleece still laughs at that image. "The next day when he told me about it, I told him he was lucky and asked if he had had any problems." "The only problem I had is that it sure did make my neck sore," the student said. \*\*\*\* Once he impressed President Marvin Miles when he powered up a Chevrolet pickup with a new carburetor. The truck had a factory carburetor that would have been recalled these days, Bleece said. "Mr. Miles asked me to see what I could do with it. I grew up with Von Allen, so I went to Von's junkyard and paid \$15 for another Chevy model carburetor that would fit and put it on Mr. Miles' truck," Bleece said. "Mr. Miles asked me how I turned that six-cylinder into a V-8. I told him to look under the hood - that it was the same six-cylinder. I never did tell him what I had done. I liked Mr. Miles and he liked cars, so we hit it off right away."



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# Gunsmithing Graduates

## Sharon Farmer Dressell

Sharon Farmer Dressell was used to being in a male-dominated environment so she didn't think taking gunsmithing at Montgomery Technical Institute would be much different. She was one of the first women who graduated from the program.

"I grew up as a tomboy with my cousins. My uncle worked on cars and I loved working with my hands, doing mechanical stuff," Sharon said. "My dad hunted, and he had bird dogs and beagles. He had a glass-front gun cabinet and no one was allowed to touch his guns or they would have gotten a whooping," she said.

Sharon was intrigued by the guns and how they worked. While she was visiting a local gun shop in her home town of Draper, Virginia, she heard someone talking about going to gunsmithing school. Later, she moved to Raleigh where she met a custom stock maker named Joe Balicki. She was in his shop when she asked if anyone knew anything about a gunsmithing school. They told her about MTI and she went the next day, toured the school, and got her name on the list. In 1980, Sharon started gunsmithing school.

Later, when she was in the program for awhile, Joe came down to do a stock making workshop and he remembered Sharon. "We got to be best buds," she said. "I would go to Joe's to get ideas. He was the one who pointed me to the custom gun field."

It wasn't easy being a gunsmithing student. Money was always an issue, but there were nice people who reached out and helped Sharon through the rough financial times.

"A guy at school told me about a couple who lived outside of town who would rent me a room for \$20 a week. I couldn't have done it if it weren't for them. I became a family member," Sharon said. Another student, Herb McClusky, was retired from the military and would drive up from Fayetteville every day for classes.

"His wife would pack his lunch and then she started packing lunches for me," Sharon said. "I think everyone felt sorry for me."

Then there were others who liked to pick and have a little fun because she was the only female.

"Some of the guys pulled tricks on me," Sharon recalled. "I had a radio and didn't like country music. So someone took my radio apart and set it where it would only play country music. Another time someone put a frog on top of my tool box. The worst thing they did was the thing I get the biggest laugh out of. I had an old Camaro and one day after class I went to put it in drive and it wouldn't go anywhere. My heart dropped. I had no money. If the transmission was out I couldn't afford to fix it. I got out of the car and walked around it, got back in, started it, put it in gear, it wouldn't budge. I looked out over the embankment and all those guys were out there laughing at me. It turns out they put locks on my tires. It was all good humored fun," she said.

Sharon recalls thinking that once she got out of school, she'd be a gunsmith.

"I think when you're young, you don't know all that's involved. They started us out with small tools that we would use. Next we learned to buff and clean and blue metal. In the machine shop we learned how to run lathes and mills; we did barreling and actions. All the while we were still making tools to use in the trade. I'm still using a lot of stuff I made in school in my gun shop today. Then we learned stock making. We built two shotguns and two rifles. Then we learned gun repair. At that time it was \$30-\$40 a quarter to go to school and we went year-round. I had a hard time scraping up money," she said.

Sharon said that the skills she learned got her her first full-time machining job, but it wasn't gunsmithing.

"In the gunsmithing field, you could take anything you learned and it's a trade within itself. I took two more years of machine shop at the community college where I grew up. I was one quarter away from graduating and was offered a job operating a CNC lathe. I was the only female out of about 150 men and made liners for extrusion machines."

Sharon continued to regularly attend American Custom Gunmakers Guild meetings. It was there she met her future husband, a custom stock maker named Paul Dressell. They married and Sharon moved to Yakimaw, Washington where she worked with her husband in the stock making business. They do other custom work as well and serve clientele all around the world.

"The most positive thing about being a female in this business is that it's easy for me to talk to people. You can be the best gun maker, but if you don't get your name out there, people won't be able to find you," Sharon said.

Sharon's work has been featured on magazine covers, and she has been to numerous career fairs and gun shows where she is now the employer instead of the student looking for a job. "It has come full circle," she said. Sharon has come a long way from being a financially-strapped student, but still has fond memories of her time at MTI.

"The most blessed thing about MTI is the wonderful people I met," she said.

## Tim Looney

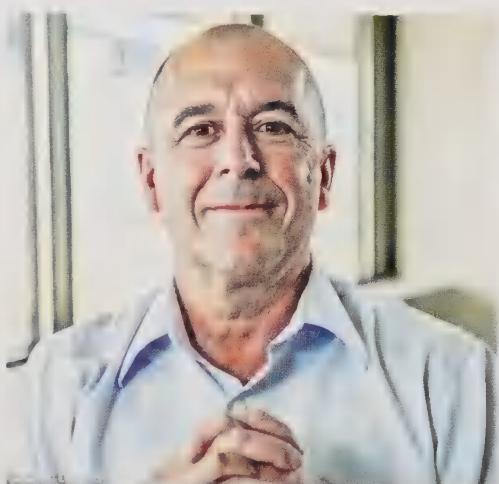
Tim enrolled in the second gunsmithing class at MTI in 1979.

Today, he is director of law enforcement and commercial sales at Colt's Mfg. Co. LLC in Hartford, Connecticut. From his first job with O.F. Mossberg & Sons Inc., he has held nearly every administrative position in the firearms manufacturing industry with Marlin, Remington and Colt firearms.

"I can't tell you how much my education at MTI was the basis for my career," Tim said in a recent telephone interview. "I have told my story hundreds of times over the years. I am approaching retirement now, but I have loved everything I ever did and it all goes back to my days at MTI."

Retirement doesn't mean he will leave gunsmithing. He has plans to open a small shop. Even though his career has taken him all over the country several times, he looks forward to taking his motor home all over it again at a leisurely pace.

Tim said manufacturers value the employee who "knows how a gun works, how to take it apart, repair it and put it back together," and combines that with an engineering degree. He earned his bachelor of applied science, manufacturing technology from Central Connecticut State University. He has written owners' manuals for firearms.



Tim credits his supportive family and his MTI family with his success.

"I was one of five children of a New York City police officer. There was no money for college, but I got a full scholarship to Long Island University. After a year and a half as a biology major, I knew that was not for me. I wanted to work with my hands and my dad understood that. I got my first rifle when I was 12 and took it apart. I also took my first car apart," Tim said. "We vacationed in upstate New York where I loved to hunt and fish. Still do."

His dad helped him research gunsmithing schools and they visited several.

"At MTI, Gene (Anderson) and Pete (Erdner) gave us such a wonderful welcome and tour. Dad bought me a camping trailer to live in and I went to day and night classes," Tim said. "I worked at Quik-Chek in Troy, opened the store in the morning, went to class, worked between classes and went back and closed the store at night. It was a busy, hectic time, but I also got married."

"I was 21 years old, nearing graduation, and we were expecting a baby. Dad started researching jobs. I applied to Mossberg and got hired. I have stayed with the manufacturing industry."

Tim was one of those students who stood out, one whom people remember as "that friendly, nice young man."

Tim's instructors, Gene, Pete and Wayne Bernauer, remember the high-energy, enthusiastic student who excelled. Tim was closer to Wayne because he was most interested in the mechanical aspect of gunsmithing. But now, he said, he appreciates his woodworking skills because he is also involved with the Colt custom shop.

Tim recalls that the instructors "were so, so dedicated. The attitude and atmosphere was that students came first."

Tim said he was inspired, not only by the dedication of the instructors, but by several handicapped classmates, including some veterans.

"I was impressed by how hard they were working to become gunsmiths, how they were adapting their circumstances to the demands of the class. I would think about what they had already overcome and were taking on this new challenge and were being successful," he said.

Over the years, Tim has stayed in touch with his instructors and with former classmate, Brian Zappia.

His career brought him back to North Carolina once for a couple of years, but he and his wife were homesick for New England, their children and grandchildren, so he got transferred "back home" to Connecticut.

But, he has never lost his appreciation and fond memories of his years at MTI.

"My education there was the basis for my career. I have nothing but great memories of my gunsmithing class and student days. MTI was a special place with special people in my life."

Then he ticks off the names of almost every staff member with a comment on how helpful, friendly and nice they were.

### Tim Carrick

Tim graduated from MCC's gunsmithing program in 1986. For over 20 years, he has owned and operated Carrick's Custom Guns, a full-service shop specializing in building custom rifles and shotguns, in his hometown of Lexington. Tim has found his niche in the gunsmithing industry by restoring high-grade rifles and shotguns, specializing in highly-valued Purdy of London and Belgium custom firearms.

"Only a handful of people do what I do. Skilled craftsman in fine, precise woodworking and checkering are becoming obsolete as more of the younger gunsmiths are trending toward tactical firearms," Tim said.

He also builds safari rifles. His specialized gun work and the relationships he has developed with his clients have taken him all

over the world - to Europe, South America and Africa. Many of his clients are members of the Vintagers Club, an organization of collectors of all handmade custom shotguns and rifles. Tim has earned their trust to restore their prized pieces. That includes, he said, making parts, engraving touchups, and a lot of woodworking.

"Stocks can get out of kilter. They have to fit the person using them," he said. "I have been to interesting places and met so many interesting people. It sounds like a life of adventure, but I have to work harder than most people ever think of."

His expertise in restorations and specialized custom stockmaking evolved, he said, from his gunsmithing and metal engraving student days at MCC, through his checkering classes with Joe Balicki and then word-of-mouth through the Vintagers.

"To be successful," Tim said, "you have to have the desire and drive to work hard. You must have some artistic ability and vision and then you 'just know' the right thing to do. You have to understand your own strengths and limitations and want to learn. You can learn something new every day if you pay attention."

Tim visited MCC with a cousin when he was a student at Central Davidson High School. His mother owns a craft shop and his dad does construction and woodworking, so he liked what he saw.

"I was the youngest person in my class. When I graduated, I had to wait six months until I turned 21 to get a Federal Firearms License," he said.

Tim had gone to night class to earn a diploma in metal engraving at the same time. He learned checkering from the legendary stockmaker Joe Balicki. Now he's on MCC's gunsmithing advisory committee and has taught checkering through the NRA specialty program for 13 years. The first five years after graduating from MCC, Tim worked out of a small shop at his parents' home. Then he bought an older house on 11 acres near Lexington. He and his dad restored the house and built a shop behind it. He has added a shooting range and describes his collections of machines and machinery as "looking like an organized salvage yard."

### Mark Dy

Mark graduated from MCC in 1998 and has come full circle to be director of the gunsmithing program. "I don't know what gunsmithing appealed to me, but it was always at the back of my mind," Mark said. "Wayne (Bernauer) knew that and when he was a few years from retirement, suggested that I apply at MCC. I was hired, worked with Wayne for three and a half years teaching the night class before he retired."

Mark brought real world experience to the classroom. After graduation, he worked as a gunsmith for 13 years, first with Clark Custom Guns in Louisiana and then Bowen Classic Arms in Tennessee. He also ran his own small business specializing in competition handguns. When he came to MCC, Mark said he was



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somewhat intimidated because he was the only one in his class fresh out of high school.

"But, by the end of the first day, I knew I was in the right place. I had found my people," he said. "MCC had a culture of students first, and that is still the culture."

In high school, Mark had found a list of gunsmithing schools in the back of a magazine and wrote to them all. MCC was way ahead of the others in responding to all his questions and that held all the way through with all the paperwork.

"The gunsmithing class did a tremendous job of making students aware of possibilities. All the ancillary skills we learned open doors to diverse careers," he said. "The most successful are those who specialize, who gravitate to their interests. Such as me wanting to teach."

Success also means being able to adapt to the reality of the dream as opposed to the expectations. One of teaching's realities is all the administrative work outside the classroom, but that's part of the job. It's still Mark's dream job.

#### Dakoda Dunn

Dakoda took a retail career track when he graduated from the MCC gunsmithing program in 2012.

"It was an opportunity and it fits my personality," Dakoda said.

He just opened his second store, Southern Variety Guns & Ammo LLC, in Biscoe Dec. 8. Dakoda, who is from High Falls, was working at Southern Variety Guns and Collectibles in Robbins while attending MCC. The owner decided to retire and offered Dakoda the store.

"When I took ownership of the store in Robbins and renamed it, I had \$300 to live on." So the 26-year old Dakoda went to work and built himself a thriving business.

"I work a lot because this is something I enjoy," he said.

Earlier this year, he had the opportunity to lease the former First National Bank building in Biscoe. Cody Garner, another MCC gunsmithing graduate, and Dakoda do the gun repairs. Dakoda said he does all the tactical work. Dakoda said he is glad to see the shooting and hunting sports management component, which teaches the business side of gunsmithing, added to the MCC programs. He said he would like to offer internships in

retail.

"There is so much to learn about running a business, especially in a gun shop, all the paperwork, the taxes, insurance, payroll. I learned retail on my own and I learned early on that if you can't afford an accountant, you shouldn't be in business," he said. "I learned about firearms and working on them at MCC. The staff there is great, the instructors are great and instruction is in a realistic environment. I enjoyed it."

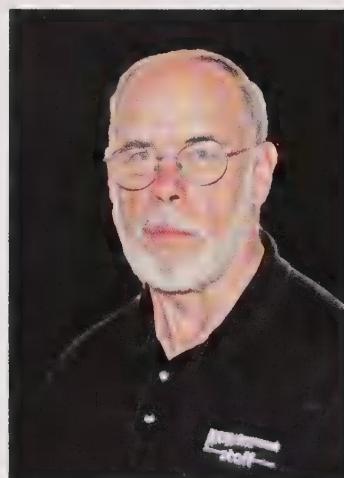
"I have a salesman's personality, but I am straightforward with my customers. I won't sell you a gun you can't afford or doesn't fit your needs," he said. "This is a word-of-mouth business and so are gunsmithing schools. When anybody asks, I tell them to go to MCC."

Growing up in High Falls, he had heard of MCC gunsmithing. When he met instructor Wayne Bernauer, he knew that was the place for him. Dakoda said area folks know his grandparents, Lillian and the late Bobby Dunn, from antique car shows.

"They collected and restored antique cars. Granddaddy Bobby is also in the dirt track racing hall of fame."

#### Matt Mutarelli

Matt was a Special Forces weapons sergeant for the U.S. Army and took gunsmithing from MCC while he was still in service. He retired after 21 years of service in 2008, graduated from MCC in 2010, began teaching weekend gunsmithing classes in 2012, then started teaching full time in 2014. Matt specializes in military and law enforcement weapons as well as traditional flint lock rifles. He owns Mutarelli Combat Custom LLC in Southern Pines.



#### Len Fagan

Len also graduated from MCC and gravitated to teaching. He is a full-time instructor in the gunsmithing program and teaches the shooting and hunting sports management program. He is also an NRA certified instructor in their specialty school. Len owns Old Lodge Armory in Willis, Virginia and specializes in custom gunsmithing on AR type rifles. Len has worked full-time in the firearms industry since 1998.

#### Jesse Houser

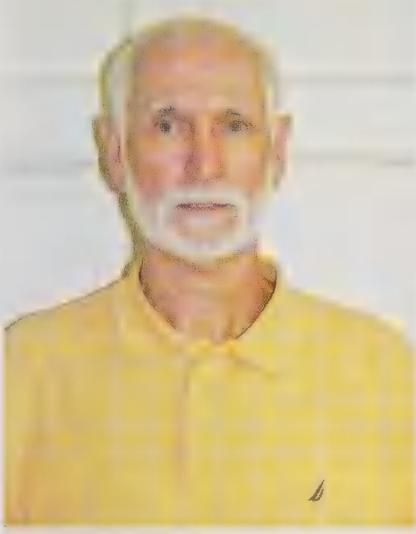
Jesse, from Star, is an MCC gunsmithing graduate who has over 30 years of teaching and professional engraving experience. His work has been spotlighted in many magazine articles and books over the last three decades. Jesse has been the engraving instructor at MCC for over 20 years and continues to teach NRA engraving courses as well.

#### Wayne Coley

Wayne is also an NRA instructor, graduate of MCC and an instructor in the gunsmithing program. He has worked in the repair industry for six years and specializes in general repair work and is experienced with multiple types of firearms.

# Harold Van Derveer

## Graduate



"It was a different world 50 years ago," said Harold Van Derveer. "When I think back to how things were then, I realize that we all have short memories."

Van Derveer was a member of the first graduating class at Montgomery Technical Institute in 1970.

"I started in the very first class in 1968 and graduated with a two-year business degree," he said. "I got as good an education at MTI as I would have had at any college. Even when my children were in college, I was reminded that my education matched theirs at major universities."

Van Derveer was 17 years old when he graduated from East Montgomery High School and had been accepted at Georgia Tech. That summer, he got a letter that the school of engineering had cancelled

the major he had applied for and offered him options, none of which appealed to him.

"It was a last minute decision to go to MTI. The school was brand new and convenient, so I enrolled. It turned out to be a good decision," he said.

His father had started Van Derveer Gas Co. in 1950, the year he was born and he had been working there since his early teens. His dad was having serious health issues and he began to accept more responsibility in the company.

"We had classes in what is now the county schools administration building. I remember classes taught by Ellen Turner, Linnie Comer, Charles Kendall and others. I remember the business machines class, with the forerunner to key punch machines. These had 10 rows of 10 keys each, and we also learned to use the 10-key calculator," he said. "Shortly after, the electronic calculator was introduced. The first one I bought cost around \$100 which was a lot of money back then."

At East Montgomery, he had learned to type on a manual typewriter. Electric typewriters were just coming in, and he learned to use them at MTI.

Van Derveer remembers MTI's first Christmas Party, hosted by Bruce and Ellen Turner at their home.

"We had about a dozen people in that first graduating class from the nursing program, secretarial science and business, so we all knew each other and all the staff," he said. "Even though I was going to school full time during the day and working in the evening, we found time to have some good times."

He remembers classmates Lewis Lamonds, John McIntyre and Steve Lassiter.

The country and Montgomery County were going through some hard times, Van Derveer said.

The Vietnam War was going on in full swing.

"It was a time that has no comparison to anything nationally that has happened since," he said.

The draft was active and Van Derveer knew he was close to being called up, so in 1970, he joined the US Army Reserve 11th Special Forces Group and served for eight years.

At home in the early 1970s, Montgomery County was in the midst of a crippling drought.

"Army tankers brought in drinking water for people. That's when

the county got serious about building a water system," he said. "We were also rather isolated as far as highways and going to Greensboro back then was a big deal, something we did only about twice a year."

Van Derveer had married Carolyn Brown and they later had two children, Kim and David.

Van Derveer Gas Co. kept growing.

He soon gained a reputation as an astute businessman who was proactive in the business world, quickly adapting to new technology.

"We had the first electronic meters in the state. You have to keep on learning and keep up with the times," he said.

In 2006, he sold Van Derveer Gas Co., after much consideration because it had been in his family since he was born.

"I left the business slowly, which helped adjust to the tough decision to sell. I ran the business for the new owners for a year and was on their acquisition team for several more years," he said.

In 2001, he and partner Jerry Holder opened Sandy Ridge Memory Care and Assisted Living near Candor. The facility has 88 memory care rooms, the second largest in the state, and 16 assisted living units. They are now in the process of building a 12,000 square-foot addition which will also be dedicated to Alzheimer's care.

In 2011, Van Derveer earned his administrator's license. He has no intention of ever retiring.

Sandy Ridge participates in the clinical training component for MCC nursing students.

"We have great staff here. The MCC nursing program is a great resource. Some of the students who want to specialize in geriatric care start working here part time before they graduate."

Van Derveer has served a four-year term on the Star Board of Commissioners and retired from the Star Fire Department as fire chief after 23 years of service.

In 1977-78, he was president of the North Carolina Propane Gas Association.

He still serves on FirstHealth Montgomery Memorial Hospital Board of Advisors, STARworks Central Park Board of Directors and the Committee to Save the Old School, a preservation effort to preserve and renovate Biscoe High School for community activities.

Van Derveer, his wife Carolyn, and son David and daughter Kim, have acquired Prestige Millwork and Heritage Moulding in Star. These businesses are operated by David and Kim, who carry on the Van Derveer family tradition of generosity and community involvement.

"It's nice to have the children and grandchildren close," he said. He and Carolyn have been blessed with five grandchildren.

Van Derveer looks back at his life 50 years ago and says he got a good start in his business career by working for his father and going to MTI.

"I enjoyed my two years there and I got a good education," he said.

*"It was a different world 50 years ago," said Harold Van Derveer. "When I think back to how things were then, I realize that we all have short memories."*

# Carolyn Williams & Margaret Greene Graduates

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Carolyn Williams was a member of the second MTI Practical Nursing graduating class in 1971, and Margaret (Rush) Greene graduated with the MTI Practical Nursing class of 1973.

Carolyn Williams went to East Montgomery High School and rode to school every day with her friend Barbara Kissell (who was Barbara Monroe at the time). They graduated high school together in 1970. Barbara had plans to attend Montgomery Technical Institute and enroll in the practical nursing program. Carolyn wanted to continue her education, but had no idea what she wanted to do with her life and couldn't afford college. The summer after graduation Carolyn went to work at Springs Industries on second shift. To say that mill work did not suit Carolyn is a gross understatement.

"I hated it. I cried and cried," Carolyn said, so she made a plan to do something different with her life.

"I called Barbara and asked her to tell me again about the practical nursing program," Carolyn said. "I talked to my mom and she brought me to MTI to talk to Mrs. Jenkins."

After finding out how much it would cost for her tuition, fees, books and supplies, Carolyn went back to the mill with a mission. "I saved every penny I made so I could go to nursing school. I worked for eight weeks and I was out of there," Carolyn said.

On her first day of nursing school, she remembers feeling overwhelmed and intimidated, but she didn't hate it, and she didn't cry. "Mrs. Jenkins was tall and overpowering. She told us what our next year of life would consist of. When I walked out that evening, my stack of books was taller than I could see around," Carolyn said.

Carolyn remembers her instructors as having very different personalities. "Mrs. Teeter was bold and strong. She said to me, 'You will be a different person when you get out of my class.' She wanted me to get over my quiet and bashful approach. Mrs. Sinclair was my OB/GYN teacher. She was warm and fuzzy – always caring."

There were 33 students in her class on the first day, but less than half made it through to graduation. "I didn't know what I was getting into. The second day we had a pop test. Every time we had another test it seemed like someone else dropped out," Carolyn said.

Carolyn, Barbara and another friend, Judy Reynolds, rode back and forth from Robbins to school every day. Carolyn recalls riding three across in the front seat of Judy's car, and Judy having to take her foot off the gas in order to get the windshield wipers to work. During the 20-minute commute, Carolyn would go over what they were supposed to have learned the day before. "Every minute of every day I studied. I would cry and I would study," she said.

The three friends didn't always study in the car, however. Judy and Carolyn introduced Barbara to Phil Kissell, who was the evening learning center coordinator at MTI at the time. Carolyn recalls their conversation on the way home from school that day.

"Barbara Gail asked us, 'Do you think I should date him? I'm not sure if I should or I shouldn't,'" Carolyn said. It was apparently meant to be, because Barbara Monroe eventually became Mrs. Phil Kissell.

Carolyn also married while she was in nursing school, just three months before graduation. She said that besides getting married, graduation was probably the best night of her life at that time. Tears filled her eyes as she recalled the memory. "I remember how proud I was when I put on my whites for the first time and marched into the church. We bowed our heads and Mrs. Sinclair pinned our hats on, then Mrs. Teeter pinned our pins on. We said our Nightingale Pledge holding our roses . . . it was pouring down rain outside. I thought, 'This is what I worked so hard for. It was worth everything I did to get here,'" she said.

Carolyn's first job was at Moore Memorial Hospital (as it was called in 1971). She, Judy and Barbara worked together there. Over the years, the three went their separate ways and Carolyn eventually went back to school to become a registered nurse – 26 years later. Since then, she spent most of her time in occupational nursing at various companies. Her sister Lisa Davis, also a registered nurse, was training nursing assistants at Montgomery Community College when she encouraged Carolyn to join her. Carolyn is now a part-time nursing assistant instructor at MCC. "It's rewarding to help someone get where they want to be in their lives," Carolyn said. "I like seeing the lightbulbs go on when they understand something and they come back and tell you what a difference you made in their lives."



Margaret Rush Greene was another early graduate of MTI's practical nursing program. She knew she wanted to be in some kind of medical field from the time she was 12 years old. Her maternal grandfather bought her a nursing kit complete with stethoscope and bandages. "He used to let me nurse him," Margaret said. When her grandfather wasn't available, she'd work on the family pets. "Poor old cats and dogs caught it," she laughed.

When Margaret graduated from East Montgomery High School she began working at Baptist Hospital in the x-ray department. At the time she was engaged to Barney Greene, who

was taking business administration classes at MTI and later got a job there as evening coordinator.

"Barney told me there was a nursing program at MTI and I said, 'I took a nursing assistant class the summer before I started in the program,'" Margaret said.

"The program was very difficult. I don't know how girls did it," Margaret said.

Margaret recalls her clinical rotations at Montgomery Memorial Hospital and Stanly Hospital.

"My first injection was very hard. It was at Montgomery Hospital and it was an insulin shot. I got to the skin and couldn't penetrate it. Dr. Sinclair pushed my hand in. After that, I went the rest of the way,"

said it got easier after her first injection.

She enjoyed her clinical rotations in the various specialty areas. "We did general rounds, pediatrics, obstetrics – I got to watch a baby being born; I got to watch gall bladder surgery; I got to watch a young man get his eyeball removed. It was sad but interesting. I didn't know there were so many blood vessels in an eye. I was fascinated," she said. While many of her classmates enjoyed working with infants, they terrified Margaret. "I was scared of the babies," she said. "You had to wash them and change them. I never had any children."

Most of the students in Margaret's class shared a close bond. She would meet with four of her classmates for a study group. After graduation she worked with one of her friends from that group, Brenda Gooch, for a number of years at Montgomery Memorial Hospital.

While they were still in the program, the director of Montgomery Memorial Hospital came to interview the students for potential jobs.

"I waited until I got married to start work because I wanted to be able to plan my wedding," Margaret said. She graduated in August and married Barney Greene in October. She was hired to begin work at Montgomery Memorial Hospital on October 17. Instead, she was admitted to the hospital for emergency gall bladder surgery.

"I was having gall bladder attacks while I was in school but I didn't know what they were. I thought it was just nerves because it was the end of the quarter," Margaret said. Soon after her honeymoon she had a major gall bladder attack which put her in the hospital.

After a six-week recovery period, she finally started working second and third shift at Montgomery Memorial where she stayed for about 10 years. Since then, she has worked at several different long-term care facilities and is now at Bethany Woods in Albemarle where she has worked for about 20 years, still on third shift. Margaret says she is now looking forward to retirement, probably in another couple of years. She and her husband Barney have two children: a daughter Janet, and a son Allen, and three grandchildren.



*Kudos to the staff, past and present, of Montgomery Community College, on reaching this milestone*  
- Susan and Gordon Knowles -



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# Auto Mechanics Graduates

The automotive repair classes at Montgomery Community College have a long history. Starting in 1968 with small gas engine classes held at West Montgomery High School, to diesel engine classes at Jordan Lumber a year later, to the automotive tune-up classes at Freeman's Garage in 1970, auto mechanics was popular, especially among high school boys. Although it had a long run as a degree program, when technology entered the picture, computerized diagnostic equipment was so expensive that the program could no longer support itself.

But back before technology took over the business, several of those high school boys who were really good at tinkering with cars took classes at Montgomery Technical Institute and eventually became auto mechanics.



## Pigford Brothers

Twin brothers, Lenny and Benny Pigford were 14 or 15 years old when they started taking the small engine class from Montgomery Technical Institute. The instructor was Everett Phillips who held classes at West Montgomery High School, and later at his shop – Phillips Chainsaw – in Troy.

"We were still in high school. We took classes after school. We weren't getting college credit or anything. Our cousin was taking the class and we got a ride from him," Lenny said.

Lenny and Benny were 16 when they enrolled in MTI's

automotive tune-up class at Freeman's Garage taught by Johnny Freeman.

"We knew Johnny Freeman, and one thing led to another so we took his class," Benny said. "Everything was hands on – there were no textbooks at that time. You could work on your own vehicle or a friend's vehicle."

Benny recalls the first class where he had to change points, plugs and rotors. Freeman said there was one part – a rotor button – that was impossible to put on the wrong way.

"It had a round pin on one end and a square pin on the other," Benny said. "Johnny said, 'You can't put a cap rotor button on wrong. It's idiot proof.' Lenny found a way to do it though."

"Yeah, I was the idiot who managed to put it on wrong. We never forgot that," Lenny laughed.

Their older brother, Boyce, was serving in the military at the time. When he was discharged from the Air Force in 1969, he joined his brothers in an auto mechanics class. He eventually decided it wasn't for him. "It was over my head," he said.

Instead, Boyce went to work doing carpentry for his father's construction business. When Lenny and Benny graduated from West Montgomery in 1970 they began doing construction work with their father as well. They were also volunteer firefighters for the Troy Fire Department at that time.

About 1976, after an incident at work, the brothers decided to take the emergency medical technician class at MTI.

"One of the guys who worked with us had an episode at work and no one knew what to do for him. We all felt helpless," Boyce said. "We thought the EMT class would be a good thing to do. We learned basic first aid and several people on the fire department took the class," he said.

It was a turning point for Boyce, who joined the rescue squad in 1977. He later went back to MTC and got his paramedic certification in 1987. He recently celebrated 40 years with Montgomery County Rescue. Lenny stayed with the fire department for 20 years until he moved to Mount Gilead. Benny retired from the fire department after more than 30 years of service.

In 1982, Lenny and Benny branched out on their own and opened Pigford Exxon, a gas station on the corner of Main Street in Troy where they also did auto repair and maintenance. Boyce continued doing carpentry work until the housing market tanked and interest rates skyrocketed in the latter part of the 80s. Then he joined his brothers in their business. In 1999, the brothers gave up selling gasoline and decided to concentrate on the service and repair part of the business. They moved into a building one block west of the Exxon station and Pigford, Inc. has been there ever since.

"It's funny how everything turned around," Lenny said. "Back then, we were working construction during the day and working on cars in our yards at night. Now, we work on cars during the day and have shops in our yards where we do carpentry at night."

MTI turned a hobby into a living for the Pigford brothers.

"We didn't realize how much (going to MTI) helped us. We're doing what we went to school for. Even if people take only one or two classes – it can improve their lives," Boyce said.

## Dempsey Owens, Sr.

Dempsey Owens Sr. graduated from the auto mechanics program in 1976 and from the auto body repair program in 1978. Dempsey took classes at the annex, the old Ford dealership building on South Main Street in Troy. The building housed several MTI programs before the college opened its own campus in 1977. "I graduated from East Montgomery in 1964 with Phil Kissell (former MCC VP of Curriculum and Student Services). They (MTI) redid the Ford dealership and turned it into auto mechanics, auto body, air conditioning, pottery and some others. I went over to the new building while they were in the process of building it and took classes there," said Dempsey.

"I had Jack Caldwell and Milas Haywood for instructors. Jim Thomas was the daytime teacher. I was working full time at Walker Shoe Company in Asheboro. I took night classes," Dempsey said.

When Dempsey finished the auto body repair program, he and his friend, Sherrill Lowder went into business together repairing vehicles. Dempsey was asked to teach the auto body program before he opened his garage but turned the job down. However, a year or two later, it was offered to him again.

"I thought to myself, you don't get a second chance, so I decided to do it. I stayed there four-and-a-half years teaching auto body repair. That's where I got to know Bleece Jordan. He taught the evening auto body class," Dempsey said. Bleece would eventually go on to teach the auto mechanics program full-time for 21 years.

"I taught at night at the new building," Dempsey said. "At first, I didn't feel qualified but they wanted someone who could do the work."

Dempsey enjoyed the work but said like everything, it got a little old working full-time at Walker Shoes during the day and teaching at night. When his son Dempsey Jr. was at West Montgomery, he took the auto body repair classes with his dad. Finally, Dempsey built a shop beside his house.

"It was just a place to piddle," he said. "Jerry Hurley kept wanting us to go into business. We worked for three years then they offered him a job at

West Montgomery teaching mechanics and he went.”

Dempsey’s “place to piddle” eventually became a full-time business and he worked at it for 40 years. These days he just tows vehicles because he says it’s difficult to keep up with the expense of the equipment needed to diagnose and fix the newer vehicles.

“The smaller shops don’t have the money to compete,” he said, then paused. “But we had a good time (at MTI),” he said, remembering the time he was taking classes.

“I remember some of the boys in Jack’s class put a whistler on one boy’s car. When it started out it whistled and smoke was rolling everywhere. ‘Get that car out of here before it starts a fire,’ Jack said. I enjoyed it. It was the only school I went to where I enjoyed doing something I liked,” Dempsey said.

“The school had a good impact and gave a lot of people jobs. A lot of people got jobs that wouldn’t have had them without MCC,” Dempsey said.

#### John Royal

One of Dempsey’s classmates was John Royal. When Dempsey signed up for mechanics classes, John’s father asked Dempsey to sign John up, too.

“John’s daddy asked me to get Johnny in, so we signed up together. We worked on cars together, solved problems together,” Dempsey said.

“Dempsey and me rebuilt a Wankel (rotary) engine with a technician from Mazda that helped us some,” John said. “It was a weird experience. We put it back in the Mazda. That’s the only one I’ve ever seen.”

John attended MTI on the GI Bill after he got out of the Army.

“I did mechanics all my life. I had an uncle that was a technician and I worked with him a whole lot,” John said.

John said he liked the classes because they involved a lot of hands-on learning and he learned more by doing than by textbooks. Because the students were allowed to work on their own vehicles, they were also allowed to learn from their mistakes.

“Most of the time we worked on our own vehicles. I remember someone blowing a battery up one time. Someone put the battery charger on backwards,” he said. “Nobody was hurt,” he added.

After he got his mechanics diploma, John went on to earn a diploma in auto body repair and then air conditioning and refrigeration at MTI.

“I wanted to learn how to work on the air conditioners in vehicles,” John said. John’s instructor, Jack Caldwell, was also the service manager at Montgomery Motors. He must have seen that John had talent and potential because he offered him a job while he was still taking classes.

“I took classes four nights a week, three hours a night started working for Jack during the day some,” John said. He soon began working full-time.

“I’ve been there ever since. Going on 43 years. I do all the diesel work now,” John said.

John was able to put what he learned at MTI into practice in order to make a living and raise a family.

#### Steve Hair

Steve Hair is another Montgomery County mechanic who took his classes at the annex. When he got out of the Army in 1977 he began working full-time and took classes part-time at night. His first memories were of the condition of the annex building.

“When I started classes I couldn’t believe how dilapidated the annex was. We drove up a ramp onto a wooden floor to work on our cars,” Steve said. Later he remembers helping to tear the building down on the inside to get ready to go to the new campus. He remembers his instructor, Milas Haywood, telling the class they weren’t going to work on cars one evening.

“It was the end of the summer quarter and there were only a few

nights of class left. We started tearing things down to move and I stepped on a nail. I went to the ER to get a shot and came right back to class,” Steve said.

After the summer break Steve says they came back to the new campus.

“They cleaned up all the tools. Everything looked new,” he said.

Like the Pigford brothers, Steve started learning mechanics in MTI’s small engines class at Phillips’ Chain Saw Shop from Elbert Phillips. He seemed to be a natural at it because when he went into the Army, he took a test and they told him he’d be a mechanic.

Steve dropped out of school and started working full-time when he was 15.

“I was going nowhere. I made about every mistake you could think of. Then I met Ruth (his wife) and she dragged me out of the gutter,” Steve said. “We were married in October 1974. Through everything, I always tried to better myself,” he said.

Steve went back to school to get his GED while working full-time. He completed his GED in 1981 and then took auto body repair classes which he completed in 1983. He went to work for Montgomery Motors in 1983.

A few months later his wife Ruth, their two daughters, and Ruth’s mother went to visit family living in Alaska. While there, they would call home and tell Steve how he could be making \$16 an hour doing mechanic work, which in 1983 was a lot of money. Several convincing phone calls later, Steve found himself in Nome, Alaska working for the National Guard maintaining snow removal equipment, jeeps, and other 4-wheel drive vehicles.

“We had 15,000 pieces of equipment,” he said. He was eventually promoted to supervisor, got a raise, and earned the Organizational Maintenance Shop of the Year. Eventually, the cold got to him since all the work was outdoors. The Hair family moved back to Troy in 1987.

“I got home on a Thursday and started back working for Montgomery Motors the following Monday,” Steve said. He worked at various dealerships until he finally opened his own shop, Steve’s Auto Repair, in 1994 and still operates his businesses and currently employs three other mechanics.

Over the years, Steve said he has had nothing but good things to say about the college.

“To me, if anyone is smart, the best thing they can do is go to the community college and save a lot of money taking transfer classes,” Steve said. “The school has done me good, and it has been good for Troy and for the county.”



# Criminal Justice Graduates



## Wayne Wooten

Wayne Wooten has spent most of his life working in public service – 10 years with Biscoe Police Department, five of those as chief; 14 years as Montgomery County Sheriff, 14 years as Clerk of Superior Court and is still serving as Montgomery County Commissioner.

Life has been an amazing journey for a boy who grew up on Troy's Mill Hill. He graduated from West Montgomery High School in 1966 at the height of the Vietnam War. Knowing the draft was imminent, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and served four years, assigned to bases in England and Ohio.

"When you grow up in a family of nine kids, college is not an option," said Wayne. He came home and went to work on third shift at Alandale Knitting. A friend mentioned that Biscoe Police had an opening and he ought to apply.

"I remember it was Halloween night in 1971, because that set me on the path to my career in law enforcement," he said. "I took a chance and talked with Chief Gary Miller and he hired me. I never dreamed of being a police officer, but once I started, it was in my blood."

Back then, the only training for officers was on the job, but Miller insisted that his officers go to Basic Law Enforcement Training, so Wayne began classes at Richmond Technical College. In 1975, he used his GI Bill to earn his AA degree in criminal justice from Montgomery Technical Institute (MTI) in 1977. Wayne and Instructor Bob Qualls became friends for life.

"Bob was sharp. He loved that program. His heart was in it. Behind the scenes, he fought a lot of battles with state agencies to keep these programs in small colleges," Wayne said. "Marvin Miles (MTI president) Ted Blake and Bruce Turner believed in the law enforcement programs and backed Bob all the way."

The success of the law enforcement programs, and the entire college, was due to the people who worked there, Wayne said. "They were not afraid to take on the bureaucrats. They knew the needs of the county and could prove it."

MTI had a lot of students from law enforcement, protective services and the Department of Corrections, not only from Montgomery County, but also from Moore, Lee and Randolph counties.

Wayne recalls that Bob lived in Siler City and rode a small motorbike back and forth every day for two years. "And, not many people know he is a skilled woodworker."

After Wayne graduated from MTI, he and the late E.J. Phillips, Troy Police Chief, went through an intensive Department of Justice course in Albemarle to become certified law enforcement instructors. Wayne taught block classes at several community colleges for 22 years.

"I found that I enjoyed teaching. It was not natural for me to get up in front of a class, but the more I did it, the more I learned," he said.

He has no idea how many future officers he taught, but for a long time, every police chief in county had worked for him, either as a Biscoe officer or a county deputy. He also stayed in touch with students Rodney Johnson, who became an ALE agent; Jeff Jordan, who followed Wayne as sheriff; and his brother, deputy Tim Jordan.

In 1975, the year Wayne started at MTI, Chief Miller resigned in Biscoe and Wayne was appointed chief by the town commissioners. Being police chief was putting on a different hat, he said, and working more closely with the public.

Wayne can't remember why he decided to challenge Sheriff Eben Wallace in the 1978 election, but he lost in a run-off. He was appointed sheriff in 1981 when Wallace resigned to accept an appointment to a state agency. He was elected in 1982 and reelected in 1986, 1990 and, being burned out, decided not to run in 1994. That was his first retirement. During his tenure, he was appointed to the N.C. Sheriffs Training and Standards Commission.

Beginning with Wayne, all Montgomery County sheriffs since have had close ties to MCC. After his second retirement after 14 years as Clerk of Court, Wayne is one of the most recognized and respected men in the county. Also one of the most humble, grateful for the blessings in his life.

"They've all been high stress jobs, but I couldn't be more honored to hold the positions I've held," he said. "I always did the best I could. I went to work every day with the intention of doing what was right."

Wayne has good memories and lifelong friends from his student and teaching years at MCC.

"Phil Kissell believed in that college and devoted his life to it. Rick Kissell taught me in the business courses. Doris Haywood (administration secretary) was a jewel, as fine a lady as ever lived. Virginia Long and Peggy Brewer were friends from childhood," Wayne said.

Wayne said he couldn't begin to measure what MCC has meant to Montgomery County.

"MCC has opened the doors for generations of people to get a good education, an opportunity to get started and go on to having a better life. A lot of good people, including myself, got a good education that we probably would never have had if it hadn't been for MCC."

## Jeff Jordan

Changing careers from veterinary technician to law enforcement seemed out of character for a farm boy, but Jeff Jordan said it was the best decision he ever made. Jordan was a vet tech at Riverbanks Zoo in Columbia, SC, when his dad, Reid Jordan, became ill and he needed to come back to Candor to help on the family farm.

He had graduated from East Montgomery High School and attended N.C. State University for two years.

"I wanted to be a veterinarian, but North Carolina didn't have a vet school back then, so I went to Central Carolina Community College for an associate in science degree in the veterinary technician program," Jeff said. "I liked working at the zoo, but my family needed me."

Jeff came home in 1978. Two years later, his dad had improved, but Jeff had decided to stay in Montgomery County.

"The problem was finding a job in Montgomery County I was qualified for. I had taken classes in an HVAC course, but found out I wasn't as interested as I thought I would be."

His brother, Tim, was a deputy for Sheriff Wayne Wooten and suggested he talk with the sheriff about a job. He was hired with the stipulation that he go to MCC for Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET).

Jeff missed the start of classes that year, so he audited every class he could until he could formally enroll nearly a year later.

"I had learned enough to stay alive and Sheriff Wooten had partnered me



with Pete Lewis as my training officer. He was the best partner a rookie could have."

His next partner was Bob Robinson and they became close.

"He was more worldly than I was and looked after me. We were partners in every sense of the word."

The first time Jeff heard of MCC was in 1971, when he was still in high school and one of his teachers, Phil Kissell, left to work at the new college, which was then Montgomery Technical Institute.

"Phil went there and camped out. He loved that place and he was a student's best friend," Jeff said.

BLET wasn't Jeff's first experience with MCC. As his dad recovered, Reid wanted to take a beekeeping course so Jeff signed up along with his dad.

"I thought taking beekeeping at a college was the coolest thing ever," Jeff said. Except for one day -

"Somebody dropped a hive. Everybody ran except me and the instructor and I wasn't going unless he did," Jeff said, laughing as he tells the story.

"I got stung about a dozen times. When we got the hive closed, everybody came back and started their favorite treatments. Some smeared honey on the stings and others took their (tobacco) chews out and rubbed them. I didn't know which was worse, getting stung or getting treated."

From the time he found his niche in law enforcement and auditing law enforcement classes through his years on the road as a patrolman, as a detective and the county's first D.A.R.E. officer, Jeff never lost touch with MCC, first as a student, then deputy and especially as sheriff.

Being sheriff was an honor, he said, but being the D.A.R.E. officer changed his life.

"The kids were wonderful. I already knew some of their parents, grandparents and aunts and uncles and got to know them all in that job," Jeff said he enjoyed every day spent at MCC.

"Instructor Bob Qualls is a legend in law enforcement education and really knowledgeable about it; I soaked in every word he said. We all thought so much of him," Jeff said. "He stood up for the

criminal justice program and, with the backing of the administration, wouldn't let the state do anything to hurt MCC."

"Some thought Instructor Cib Greene was tough on students, but he expected nothing less than your best and I learned to love him. He represented MCC perfectly."

Sheriff Wooten was also an instructor. "He made sure you understood what he was talking about. He was very thorough," Bruce Wooten was one of Jeff's favorite administrators.

"He really supported our program and was interested in what we were doing. We counted on Bruce to join in role-playing in situational training. He was great at it," Jeff said.

"I had a good time at MCC and as a deputy. By that time, I wouldn't have left Montgomery County for anything," Jeff said.

Sheriff Wooten decided to retire at the end of his term in 1994. Jeff ran and was elected and then reelected until he decided to retire in 2010.

During his tenure as sheriff, Jeff also did some teaching, but he depended on MCC for training for his officers. In his 16 years in office, the size of his force doubled, computers replaced typewriters, the 911-system was established, and there was an influx of other cultures into the county, all requiring training beyond basic law enforcement. Also, the sheriff's department moved from the courthouse to the former Savings and Loan building. Jeff oversaw that renovation, the construction of the 911 Center, the construction of the county jail on Glen Road and the transfer of inmates into the new facility.

Jeff said all the changes were educational for him, especially design and construction of the jail.

"That was a challenge, but I enjoyed it. MCC was right there for our annual trainings; MCC people had their act together," Jeff said. "Gary Saunders (Continuing Education director) made sure we had whatever we needed."

When the Law Enforcement Association was able to build a firing

range on its property on NC 109, Jeff said he was hesitant to move the shooting component from MCC.

"E.J. Phillips (Troy Police Chief) was the range instructor and let me tell you, he cut no corners on training," Jeff said. "We started easing over there, and MCC pitched right in to help us," Jeff said.

What neither was consciously aware of at the time was that Col. Reese Blair, who had donated land for the college, had also donated the NC 109 property to the law enforcement association.

"It is an ideal place in a beautiful wooded area, away from a populated area, and there was already a vacant house on it that we used as a clubhouse and training facility," Jeff said. Jeff said he came to appreciate MCC more after graduation and in his professional life.

"Every person there was trying to make the county a better place. MCC gives people opportunities they would never have had without it. That place is gold."

### Dempsey Owens Jr.

We were unable to connect with former sheriff, Dempsey Owens Jr., but he was also an MCC alumnus, earning his degree in autobody repair. While at first it looked like he might follow in his father's footsteps and help Dempsey Sr. in his auto mechanics business, his father encouraged him to do something else.

"Dempsey wanted to hang around me and he came to school with me a lot. He worked with me a year or two but I told him if he could do something else, to get out of it," Dempsey Sr. said.

Today, these little shops can't compete. They change the cars every day. Everything has to be programmed with a computer and little shops don't have the money to keep up with the technology," he said.

Dempsey Jr. took his father's advice. Several years passed before he went back to MCC to complete a degree in criminal justice. He later served a term as Montgomery County Sheriff from 2010-2014.



### Chris Watkins

Some people may not know that Sheriff Chris Watkins was an early graduate of Montgomery Technical Institute's (MTI) practical nursing program. Chris is from Troy and went to high school for two years at West Montgomery. He wanted to join ROTC but West didn't have a program at the time. So Chris moved to Florida and lived with family while he attended Orange Park High School, a military academy where he joined Naval ROTC for his last two years of high school.

While in Florida, he became a member of the volunteer fire department in Jacksonville and became interested in paramedics. After high school, he moved back to Troy, only to find that there were no paramedic programs in North Carolina. MTI trained emergency medical technicians, but did no advanced paramedic training at the time.

He met MTI Practical Nursing instructors Debbie Morton and Deborah Hunsucker, who encouraged him to enroll in the practical nursing program. While Chris wasn't the first male in the program, he was the only male in his class.

Chris graduated in 1980 and before he even passed the state exam, he was employed by Stanly Memorial Hospital as it was known at the time. Chris did his clinicals at Stanly and they were very interested in him because he was male.

"They saw the value of having a male on the nursing staff so they hired me," Chris said. Chris worked for Stanly Memorial for about two years.



*“They saw the value of having a male on the nursing staff so they hired me,”*

but his desire to be in the excitement of fire-fighting, paramedics, or law enforcement continued to draw him.

“I was at a crossroads. I was still looking for something more, like first responding,” Chris said. That’s what led him to meet Montgomery County Sheriff Eben Wallace and Captain Bob Knight.

“The two of them told me about the duties of a deputy sheriff. It sounded good to me and I applied for a job,” Chris said. He began working as a deputy sheriff and within a year was back at MTI in the criminal justice program under instructor Bob Qualls.

“I went when MTI was still in the old board of education building,” Chris said. “Back then, MTI was one of the flagship providers of basic law enforcement training. At that time, there were students from two counties away attending classes there. Bob (Qualls) was a pioneer in getting the program started,” he said.

Identical criminal justice classes were offered day and evening at the time so working officers could attend according to their work schedules.

“It worked well for me because I worked different shifts and could still go to class. That was a huge plus,” Chris said.

Another difference in the early criminal justice program was the classes that were included in the curriculum. Responding to the requests he solicited from different law enforcement agencies around the county, Bob Qualls developed classes that would train potential law enforcement officers. There was no formal law enforcement training at the time, and Bob incorporated those classes to help fill that need.

“I knew if we put these classes into the degree program, people could get certified to become law enforcement officers and get a degree at the same time. We designed the program to fit the community,” Bob said.

Once students successfully completed the program, Bob could certify the students as law enforcement officers to the satisfaction of the N.C. Law Enforcement Training and Standards Commission.

“Bob was a coordinator as well as an instructor,” Chris said. “He wore several hats at the same time. He was very professional and very flexible to meet the needs of the students and police and sheriff’s offices.”

Chris recalled one incident in class where he thought Bob was being less than professional, but it turned out he was preparing his students to be quick thinkers.

“During one of the blocks of instruction, one of the employees, Kathy Harris, came into the classroom unannounced and threatened Bob to the point of assaulting him. This unfolded in front of the class of students. The door flew open and Kathy came in and they became very verbal and combative with each other, fingers pointing and threats made. It was theatrical, but believable. Myself and a sworn officer were in class with our uniforms on, and everyone was looking at us wondering what we were going to do about it. It got to the point that we separated them and took them into the hall and tried to talk to them. We felt compelled to restore peace. Then Bob informed us it was a learning scenario,” Chris said. “They joked later about almost getting locked up while teaching class,” he said.

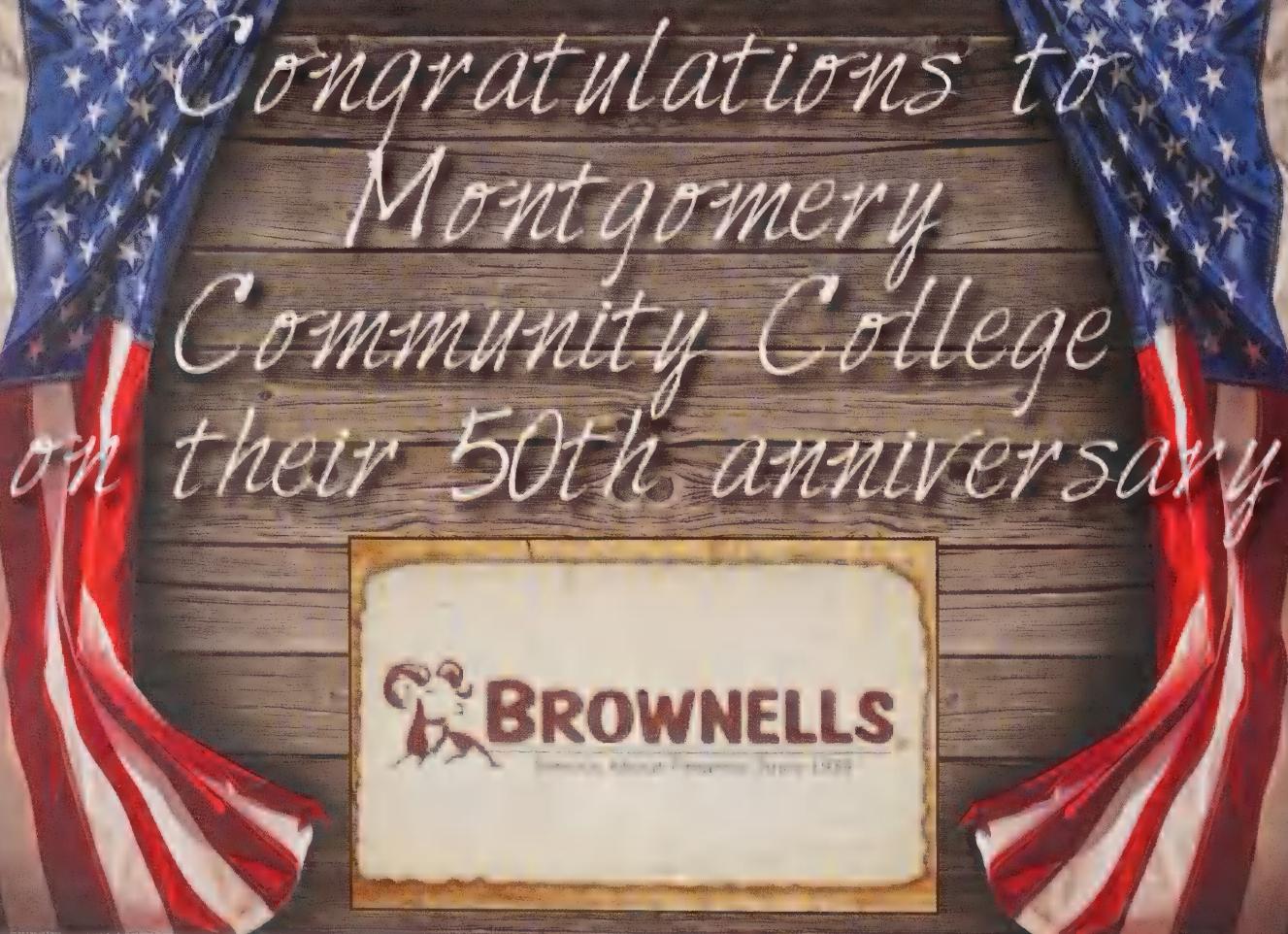
As the law enforcement profession grew, the college provided more classes to fill the agencies’ needs.

Chris said, “Sheriff (Wayne) Wooten saw that typing reports would make them more professional,” not to mention more readable. However, many officers used the “two-finger method” of typing, which was time-consuming. So officers went to school to learn how to type or to gain basic composition skills for report writing.

There was always a strong relationship between law enforcement agencies and the college. Every Montgomery County Sheriff since Eben Wallace has attended Montgomery Community College.

“If it hadn’t been for MTI, I wouldn’t be where I am,” Chris said.

Chris has worked in law enforcement for 36 years. He retired as an officer in 2010 and ran for sheriff in 2014. Chris is married to Susan, who is retired from the Department of Corrections. They have two daughters.



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**BROWNEILLS**

# Pottery Graduates

In 1972, pottery was a natural choice for the new technical institute being established in an area that had been home to potters since the first settlers found the clay deposits perfect to make their necessary wares. Pottery students have come from nearly every state and several foreign countries. Many are still working in their home states and many chose to stay in the in the Seagrove area. MCC has been recognized as revitalizing the pottery industry. Less than a dozen working potters were in business in the 1970s. The debate continues as to whether or not that was good or whether the area was flooded with too many potters. The tourists still come. Museums have been established. Major shows draw thousands of visitors.

## Why they chose MTI, MCC

These five took different routes to MCC and to Seagrove.

**Mack Chriscoe** followed his ancestors, the Chriscoes and the Foxes, as a traditional potter of functional ware since he opened Chriscoe Pottery 35 years ago. He was the 10th potter in Seagrove in 1982.

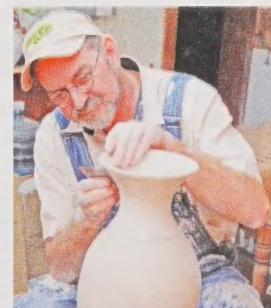
Mack said Waymon Cole suggested he go to MTI. Waymon said he had read about the school in the paper and had heard good things about it. Regina Voncannon, after 20 years as a traditional potter, has transitioned into more imaginative designs to appeal to younger shoppers at Pottery Junction. Legendary potter Dorothy Auman recommended MCC to Regina. David Garner, whose pottery lineage goes back 300 years, specializes in stoneware and salt-fired and raku traditional pottery with original finishes and design by Deborah Garner at Turn & Burn Pottery, which they opened 32 years ago.

David and Mike Ferree grew up in the same neighborhood in Asheboro, so MTI was an obvious choice.

**Phil Morgan** revived an ancient glaze and firing process when he chose to specialize in crystalline finishes 35 years ago. At the time, he was one of 13 potters in the world producing crystalline pieces. "I became a potter because I walked in the wrong door," Phil teases. "I was told to go to The Annex to register for a vocational course and accidentally walked into a pottery class."

**Fred Johnston** came to MCC in 1988 and soaked up everything MCC had to offer. Instructor Mike Ferree insisted and cajoled him into university training. Two degrees later, Johnston came back to Seagrove where he and his wife, ceramic artist Carol Gentithes, opened Johnston and Gentithes Art pottery.

Fred was drawn to pottery at an early age. In Sanford, he met sisters Neola and Celia Cole, daughters of master potter A.R. Cole, who befriended him and gave him directions to Seagrove.



## What they learned at MTI, MCC

A potter is an artist whose individual creativity takes them in their personal direction, but they all said that MCC gave them the training, direction and information to go out on their own. "Mike was a laid-back kind of guy, but he was a taskmaster. Students were involved in purchasing, processing clay, kiln building, formulating glazes, firing and, of course, being taught to make flawless pots," said Regina. "We learned all aspects of the business and Mike stressed and demonstrated the work ethic that would be necessary to be successful."

**David Garner**, who had worked for many potters, said, "I went to MCC to develop skills and more insight into the firing process. Mike Ferree understood what I had to know to be able to do what I wanted to do and taught me the skills. I got everything I expected and then some."

When Phil Morgan was discharged from the US Army, he earned his business degree from MTI, but found the professional workplace too confining. "I wanted to work with my hands. That's when I was directed to The Annex to talk with someone about a vocational course and went in the wrong door. I was hooked," Phil said. "I loved the art. I would stay in class 16 hours a day. Mike was a hands-on teacher. The course was perfect and taught me all I wanted to know."

**Mack Chriscoe** said his goal was to be self-employed, to learn kiln-building and to make balanced pottery. All five talked about the camaraderie in the pottery classes, how students helped each other, how the administration was friendly and supportive.

"Such a kind school where everybody bent over backwards to help each other," Regina said. They learned alongside others who have also been successful and nationally recognized, over the years including Millie and Al McCanless, who founded Dover Pottery and whose four children are following in their footsteps; John Mellage at Cady Clay Works, Laura Teague Moore, Bob Brotherton, Bobbie Ewing Listerman, Ann Raven Jorgenson, Judy Freeman, Dwight Holland..... Susuma Ikuta was the first Japanese student and worked in the Raleigh area. His work is in the Mint Museum permanent collection.



Norma Lockney has a studio in Concord and Mary Scholomacher has a gallery in New York. "Just ride through Seagrove in any direction and you will see an MIT pottery student," Chriscoe said.

### The value of a community college

The potters agreed that MTI, later MCC, was a valuable asset for Montgomery County and the pottery industry, no only in North Carolina, but all over the country.

Mack said he could argue both sides of training more potters – now about 90 – working in the Seagrove area. The original intent of the program was to train assistants and interns for the working potters, and a lot of them did that, Mack said, but, on the other hand, too many made it hard for any to make a living. Yet, Mack argues back and forth, more shops bring more tourists.

"Important for potters? Oh yes," said Regina. "In any business, it is super important to have structure, to learn the basics. MCC grads have built an industry here and brought a lot of people to town. "Artists at MCC have given people a sensitivity to crafts and made them open to new information."

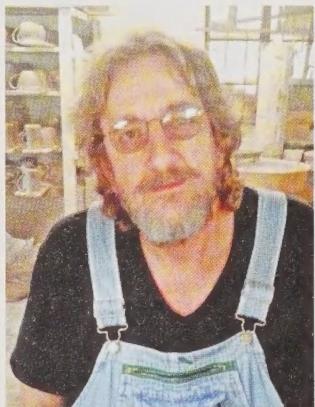
The most valuable asset for potters is the MCC library, Regina said. "That library houses one of the best collections of pottery books and videos to be found anywhere. It is a wonderful resource." David Garner called MCC a place where anybody can get a well-rounded education. "The pottery program, which is dedicated to a material and a process is the best kept secret in the clay world," he said. "I know they didn't have money for advertising, but the word of mouth and work by the students built an international reputation."

Phil Morgan said MCC has made a positive impact on the Seagrove pottery community and played a big role in the revival of pottery in America. "People enjoy the art and craft of pottery and appreciate its history. MCC graduates revived that interest and gave us the opportunity to built a museum to document that we are the history pottery center in North Carolina," he said.

MCC, Phil added, has given everyone the opportunity to learn and to stay and work in the county and make a better life for their families. Fred Johnston is an enthusiastic advocate of community colleges. At Alfred University and later at Penn State where he had a scholarship to his master of fine arts degree, Johnston said the top scholars were products of community colleges. "I grew up poor in rural Virginia. When I got to MCC, I had to work to pay my way, but that was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. Mike Ferree had that instinct to insist that I go on and set me on the path that led me to where I am today. I would never have had those opportunities without my two years at MCC. Mike was the catalyst, the springboard to move me forward," Fred said.

Fred said MCC is where he learned the basics and got a good foundation to build on. "When you understand the history and value of your subject, that teaches you to be your own teacher."

### Where are they now



**Mack Chriscoe** is an old-school potter. Other than being profiled on [discoverseagrove.com](http://discoverseagrove.com), he does not advertise, doesn't have a website or a cellphone. He doesn't participate in shows and never capitalized on his background. "I have had my picture in the paper a time or two," he said. When you walk into his studio on N.C. 705, you see the purity and perfection of form and lines reminiscent of his great-grandfathers, Daniel Dawson Chriscoe and James Fox. Mack had no ambition to be a potter, but he was constantly drawn to the craft. As a child, he had crawled around in the dirt at Melvin Owens' shop when his folks visited. When Waymon Cole married his aunt Beatrice, Mack got to know Waymon and his interest grew. "I made me a wheel at home. Waymon tutored me on a few basics, as much as he had time. One day he told me about the school at MTI, that he had heard good things about it, so I went and signed up," Mack said. "That was in 1979."

He opened his shop in 1982. Three years later, he quit his third-shift job at Burlington Industries, and became a full time potter, the 10th shop in the Seagrove area. For the past 35 years, business has been up and down for Mack and other potters. From time to time, he has supplemented his income with third-shift jobs at local industries, but he had the shop open every day and kept on turning.

"I will never retire. I have enjoyed working with clay from the first handful 'til today. It's who I am."

**David Garner** is affectionately called the honorary mayor of The Village of Yesteryear at the N.C. State Fair where he has been featured for 28 years now. One of his many honors was being named Craftsman of the Year in 2005, an honor also bestowed on his wife, artist Deborah Garner, in 2014. David and Deborah opened Turn & Burn Pottery on East Avenue in Seagrove 32 years ago. From that modest shop, they have been featured in numerous newspaper and magazine articles and have their work in many galleries and museums.

The legacy of potters goes back 300 years on both sides of David's family through the Teagues, Cravens, Coles and Owen familys. Ben Owen III was the best man at David and Deborah's wedding. "My parents were always supportive, always encouraging, about whatever I wanted to do – except pottery," David said with a laugh. They couldn't see making a living as a potter."

David grew up in Asheboro, graduated from Asheboro High School and earned an associate degree from UNCG through Randolph Community College. For several years, he worked at Cole's Pottery and at Humble Mill Pottery for Jerry and Charlotte Wooten Fenberg.

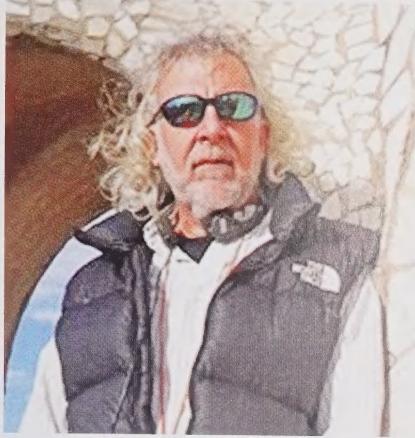
MCC was an obvious choice for study, since David and Mike Ferree were childhood friends. "At anytime since, I can call Mike when I run into a problem. He knows the answer or where to find it," David said.

His first job after graduation was in Wilmington, making piggy banks for a dinnerware company that was bought by Pfaltzgraff. He came back to Seagrove and worked for Ben Owen and built Fred Bean's first kiln. "I have worked for and learned from the best potters here in Seagrove," David said.

At Turn & Burn, Deborah is the artist. David gets satisfaction from perfecting forms and experimenting with glazes techniques and effects,

such as horsehair embellishments. He uses real horsehair to create the design. This year, the National Wild Turkey Federation asked for specially designed pots for an event.

"Bring me a feather," David said. The results were perfect. Not even thinking of retiring, David said. "Not as long as we enjoy what we do and get to share that with so many people."



**Fred Johnston** and Carol Gentithes, his wife and ceramic artist, have recently moved into a new studio and home of their own design on Fork Creek Mill Road in Seagrove. They had been in a small house-studio on Main Street in Seagrove for 20 years. With their education, training, travel and accomplishments, they had the credentials to settle down anywhere in the world. They chose Seagrove. Fred had found his calling in pottery at MCC and early encouragement from artists he genuinely respected, including Al McCanless and Dwight Holland. "They had more confidence in me than I had. I was still a poor, rural Virginia country boy, very unsure of myself," he said. At the insistence of Mike Ferree, he went to Alfred University, where Fred said he "met his tribe. And I didn't even know I had a tribe." The energy and enthusiasm of creative artists was nourishment for Fred's creative mind. That's where he met ceramic artist Carol Gentithes. Mike Ferree called Fred "a sponge," who soaked up knowledge and skill. "When I said I could make 200 dinner plates a day, I was challenged to make 200 plates of different shapes and sizes. Do you have any idea how many sizes a dinner plate can be?" Fred said. Fred saw his first potter during a second-grade field trip to Jamestown, convinced a seventh-grade teacher to let him try a wheel he found, and had some art instruction in 10th grade. Now he struggles to define his still-evolving style. "I have a diversity of styles, all done as I try a new idea. Electric, for sure. Intuitive - yes; and emotional. I want to evoke an emotional response," Fred said. Fred looks to the past in Seagrove as well to other cultures for inspiration. Seagrove, he said, has become

an international community which leads to open exchange of ideas. In a previous interview, Johnston said he sometimes feels that he is moved by a power that is beyond and greater than himself.

"That is when the best things happen," he said. Fred has been featured in newspapers and magazines. His work is in the permanent collections at the Mint Museum, the Hermitage and the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee. He participates in the NC Pottery Center events and the Celebration of Seagrove Potters. **Phil Morgan** is one of the most recognized names in the pottery world. He created his niche with crystalline pottery and for many years, was the only Seagrove potter, and one of a few in the world, to perfect the old high-fired technique. The first crystalline piece he ever saw was on a field trip with MCC students to Midland Crafters in Pinehurst. "They had three little pieces. One, about two inches tall, was priced at \$90. That was more than a week's salary for me, so I decided I would learn to make it," Phil said. For 200 years it was typical for a potter to have a paying job and make pottery. Phil graduated from MTI in the mid-1970s, bought a pottery wheel, got used bricks from an old brick company to build a kiln, processed his own clay and went to work. He and Julia, his wife and partner, traveled to at least 20 shows a year from Washington DC to Florida to Texas, while at the same time, keeping the showroom in Seagrove stocked. "Everywhere I went, I represented Seagrove," Phil said. He has been honored with dozens of awards and featured in numerous magazines and newspapers. He was named "Master Potter" by the N.C. General Assembly and was a guest on Good Morning America in 1995. Several former governors are Morgan pottery collectors. Phil has made gifts to be presented to foreign dignitaries for six presidents. His work is in the permanent collection in the Mint Museum and the Smithsonian has purchased a number of pieces. In 1983, Phil was instrumental in organizing the first Seagrove Pottery Festival and in establishing the N.C. Museum of Traditional Pottery. In 1988, when Seagrove had grown to 22 potters, members of the Wedgwood Collector's Society came to town. Phil and Sir Wedgwood struck up a friendship and his lordship made subsequent visits. Celebrity visitors, including rock stars, country music stars, and actors, have quietly come to shop. The Morgans respect their privacy.

"It is an honor to have celebrities in my shop, but every customer is equally important," Phil said. "If you like my work, I want you to have it, no matter what you do." After over 35 years at the edge of town of N.C. 705, health issues resulting from his US Army years, have forced Phil into semi-retirement.

He still does consignment pieces and still creates on the wheel on days when he is strong enough to handle the clay.

**Regina Voncannon** had a business degree and was studying commercial art when she married Eddie Voncannon and moved to his hometown of Seagrove.

Regina was raised in a military family and living in Washington State when she met Eddie. "I wasn't from anywhere. We moved every few years and I didn't have the roots that Eddie had. I wanted that tradition, that family connection," she said. "In her Southern-lady not-so-subtle way, Eddie's grandmother, Nina, took me to meet Dorothy Auman under the guise of picking out a wedding gift. Nina wanted us to live in Seagrove, but she also recognized my creativity. She thought pottery would keep us here - and she was right." Regina was impressed with Dorothy Auman. A woman potter!

"It was amazing to watch her work and hers and Walters' shop was so idyllic," Regina said. As they got to know each other, Dorothy recommended MCC. Regina visited the school to see what she would learn and how she would fit in. For three years, she drove to Troy from Durham, where she was living, three days a week for day and evening classes.

"Mike Ferree was a knowledgeable, creative, great teacher," Regina said. "Learning to be a potter is a process that takes time and dedication." In 1989, Regina opened Pottery Junction, which is now located on Main Street in a renovated building that once housed a Voncannon family business.

"I really didn't want to be a traditional potter, but I had to be realistic about what the market expected," Regina said. She and Eddie settled into a traditional life centered around family. She was successful and developed a following. The children of her first customers now come to her shop.

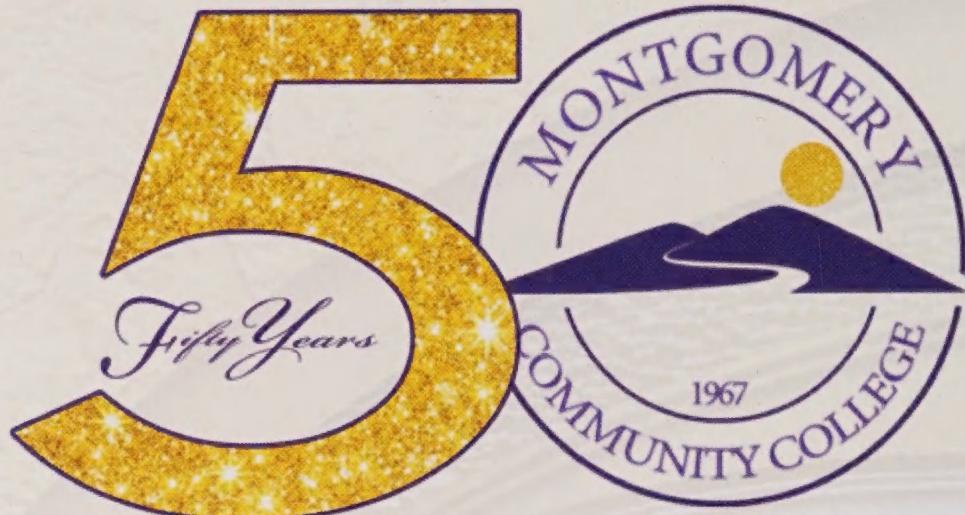
Regina was a good student at MCC. Over the years, she taught classes for MCC. When Mike Ferree retired, he recommended her to teach, which she did part time for a while. Three years ago, her beloved Eddie died unexpectedly.

Without the love of her life, her anchor, her benefactor, Regina was lost. "When I walked into the shop, I couldn't work for hysterical crying. I didn't know how to keep living," Regina said. Her pottery friends rallied around her and took her into their homes and hearts as she struggled.

"They saved my life," she said. Regina said grief also opened her heart to long-neglected creativity. "I still make everything with a purpose, but I follow different guidelines. My work now is decorative, artistic, whimsical, wherever my imagination takes me," she said. The showroom shines with bright colors and abstract shapes. "What I want to do is bring new people to the area, to appeal to a younger market. My old customers have all the pottery they want, but their children, now in their 30s, love the fresh approach to pottery. I love the experimentation." Regina is happy to see art potters beginning to move into the area. She was elated when a long-time traditional potter came to her shop and told her he liked her fresh ideas and called her work "a benchmark of creativity." Hearing that from someone she respected validated her new outlook on life and pottery.

Regina was the Featured Potter at the 30th Seagrove Pottery Festival and had been featured in newspaper and magazine articles.





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